

Publisher's Note

This is a novel with a South African setting. The chief characters are coloured; but the story is only indirectly about the problems and politics of colour; its real concern is with people beneath the skin, in their despair and love, their intemperateness and forbearance.

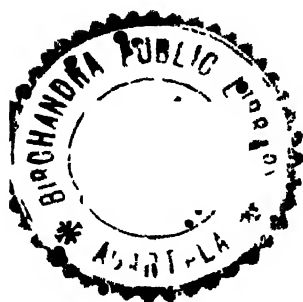
The characters are etched with unsentimental sympathy and unprejudiced insight, so that they come vividly to life. Their story moves in splendour and beauty, through tragedy and romance: a full, convincing, and rewarding novel of character.

Mother Mountain

A NOVEL

by

HAYDEN ROBERTS



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Chapter 1

TAKING a tighter hold of the flowers bunched in her fist, Martha Baart heaved herself up the last slope. She stood a moment at the top, collecting her breath, before lowering her great bulk carefully down on to a rock that stuck out of the gorse. She smiled across at Annie Sapeika, who was sitting in the shade of a boulder.

"Well, Ennie, Francis end me been orl over de mountain. It's lovely. Pity it's getting late."

Annie's fat brown face suddenly seemed to crinkle and fall back into an habitual pattern of sadness.

"Oh Mart'a, we got to go so soon? We vest got here! It's nice up here—so quiet."

Martha, still puffing from her exertions, shook her head. "Sorry, Ennie. I know. It's very nice, but if Yoe Baart come home end find no supper ready—den, *pas op!* End it's a long way. Anyway, I found a few flowers—some for yoa." She turned and waved her hand at her son. "Francis, put de flowers in de *berske*, so long."

Annie rolled up her knitting wearily, and prepared to heave herself up, and as she struggled to her feet Martha leaned down and supported her.

"We got to walk, Mart'a?"

"Well, we got to start walking; but maybe we get a lift, like w'en we come up. Anyway; it's downhill once we get to de top."

"But de districk nurse say I got to go easy, so I don' get enudder stroke." After a day of contentment Annie's voice was regaining its normal plaintiveness.

Martha shrugged, but when she answered, her voice was sympathetic. "P'reps yoa shouldn' come. It's my fault to bring . . ."

"Oh, no, Mart'a! I *arsked* yoa! It's not yoa fault!" She paused, and smiled with the same plaintive expression. "I'm oright, Mart'a. Honest!"

Annie picked up her basket, and the three of them set off, back to the top of the shallow *nek* where the road, climbing up from the Atlantic, turned down again toward False Bay and Simonstown on the other side of the Peninsula. The Atlantic stretched out to the horizon behind them as they followed the road slowly to the summit. A large car raced up from Camel Rock, and passed the two slow-moving Coloured women and the small Coloured boy as if they were not there. In a moment it had disappeared over the summit, and Francis, with his thumb to his nose, had sent it their benediction. Annie's eyes followed it sadly.

They were soon at the highest point of the road, with the steep hill falling away to the docks tucked into a corner of the bay below them. But it was not downward that the eye went; it was caught and lifted and swept up over the whole glory of the world. False Bay provoking the land with her sharp surf-edge, matching her grandeur against the sky, lifting the mountains on her far shore to tease the aloofness of heaven, and then dropping them as she swept southward to make a union in infinity.

At this point, for Annie's sake they rested at the side of the road, while Annie herself dropped on to the grass verge, fanning her broad pudding-face. While they rested, it grew a little chilly, and the clouds began to come down over the Peninsula from the north-west in long grey lines, making one of their last sorties before spring came with the south-easterly winds.

Martha suddenly beckoned to Francis. "Bring de flowers, Francis. I better try to hide dem." He reached them across to her, and she took them from the basket, rolled them in newspaper, and tried to stuff them down into her bosom. But it crushed them. She withdrew them, shook her head, and returned them to Francis. The picking of mountain-flowers was forbidden, and a policeman might stop them down in Simonstown and ask to see what was in the basket. But it would have taken a careful look to notice an extra trifle tucked in that bosom of Martha's—and a braver indelicacy than even a Simonstown policeman possessed to make any remark about it.

"Agh well, never mind. We'll take a charnce." So the flowers went back into the basket and were covered over. She sighed, and looked at Annie. "P'reps we better go now, Ennie. De clouds is coming up. Come on, Francis, take Mrs Sapeika's barsket, men."

And at length, after stopping often for Annie, they came down into the main road that runs from Simonstown up toward Mufzenberg and home. When they were still a short way from the station, a train clattered in, but they made no attempt to hurry and catch it, for Martha was half-supporting Annie, and Francis was carrying both baskets. The three of them came slowly toward the station. When at length they arrived on the platform, and another train came in, they climbed in and dropped wearily on to the hard seats, sighing with relief.

As the train pulled out on its return toward Cape Town, Annie smiled happily. "'Twas nice, eh Mart'a? Redhill is nice."

Martha nodded. Redhill, high above two oceans, was always nice.

The long clouds stretched across the Cape Flats like the floorboards of heaven. Martin Baart stepped down from the train at Clareview Station later that day. The very light was grey—clear and with a watery translucence, but grey, informing everything with its sombreness. Out beyond the suburbs, in the centre of the Flats, the lone, high chimney of the cement factory thrust upward and trailed its long white pennant of smoke in the wind. And Martin's spirit was in tune with the weather. Everything was unfriendly and aloof. The day, starting bright, had drawn in on itself. The mountains stood round like aged cynics: Table Mountain frowning over him on one side, with its black bastions stretching back along the Peninsula; and on the other side, across the Flats the Hottentot's Holland, unmoved by any man's unhappiness.

Martin had thought that there would be little difficulty in getting the job which had been advertised in the paper: "Messenger boy, wholesale merchant—intelligent and

smart." Martin had gone with some confidence. And at first the merchant had seemed to be well impressed by him. Martin knew the city well; he could read; he looked tidy enough, and seemed intelligent. The merchant had nodded quite affably, and there had been no summary dismissal after only a half-dozen or so words. Then he had continued his interrogation.

"You can read, eh! Bin to school for a bit?"

Martin had answered, "Yes."

"How long?"

"Five years."

The merchant's eyebrows had gone up. Then he had looked down at his desk and fiddled with a pen, frowning slightly. When he had raised his head again he had not looked directly at Martin.

"Mmm." He had looked as if he were wondering what to say. "Perhaps . . . perhaps this is not . . . not what you want . . . not really suitable. Not very much to it, you know. No . . . I think . . ." He had shaken his head. "No . . . sorry. Maybe this isn't your mark. Very sorry." He had sat down, and when Martin had stood waiting, bewildered by the sudden collapse of his hopes, the merchant had glanced up at him with a look of dismissal. Martin had turned slowly, and had left.

He had walked down toward Adderley Street station with a sense of failure, with which he had begun to be familiar, surging up in him. For this was not the first time that this kind of thing had happened, that he had gone to ask for a job and had left without one. On each succeeding occasion his confidence had been weaker, and his disappointment greater. They all wanted someone intelligent and smart, but not too intelligent, not full of five years of book-learning.

. . . These clever ones who've been to school too long get big ideas. You have to be pretty careful with them. . . . Keep your place. . . . The squalid backsides of machine shops slid past the carriage. . . . Anyone can tell you any time to go and learn to swing a hammer or ride a bicycle with a bundle of letters or . . . A level crossing leading from a back street to a back street clattered by. . . . Be a fisherman, or do anything but read a book.

. . . The sooty under-belly of a bridge with the stink of a tannery crawled past. . . .

As Martin left the train, came out on to the Clareview station platform, and turned up the street from the station, he felt that every road was beginning to lead to a dead end. None opened out with hope and led on to opportunity. It filled him with frustration and anger, and a profound melancholy, and he revolted from having to push himself forward any more. It began to look as if it would be better to stop the unequal struggle and to drift wherever the current of things took him.

"Harro men, Baart! *Hoe gaan dit?*"

Martin looked round to see Johnnie Peterson coming up behind him. Johnnie, whose voice was as rough as his appearance, ambled along in baggy trousers, old shirt, and his inevitable cloth cap on the side of his head.

"Hallo, Johnnie. Not too bad, not too good."

"Yoa still looking for a bleddy yob, eh? Not finding anyting yet?"

Martin had never understood how Johnnie always knew everyone's business. Nothing seemed to happen in the neighbourhood but that Johnnie knew of it. And when he talked of anything in his casual manner, with a smile showing at the corners of his mouth, no one knew whether or not he was treating it as a joke. There was always an unsettling suspicion of cynicism about him.

For a moment Martin was about to flare up and bark at him and show resentment of Johnnie's prying. But he knew that Johnnie would simply grin. So Martin shrugged. "Yah, still looking. But I suppose it's oright. I still hev time to find something."

"Not fed up yet? Yoa bin looking for quite a time now, men. Maybe yoa too fussy, eh?"

"Maybe."

Johnnie had never been more than an acquaintance of Martin's. He had always greeted him, and been friendly toward him, and Martin had felt that in some way, for some reason, Johnnie liked him, even admired him. He had often felt that it would be good to know Johnnie better, and become friendly with him, but he had never gone

further than that. Johnnie was too colourful, in his language and in his habits. Though no older than Martin, he had a more worldly outlook, knowing all the dodges, for he had been looking after himself for many years and was self-reliant to an uncomfortable degree. He had taken jobs here and there, of different kinds, but had never settled in one of them. He had been in the police courts more than once, but he took all that as a kind of joke.

That was one of his characteristics, one which everyone in the neighbourhood knew and, in a way, respected. Appearing to bear no real malice toward anyone, he had the reputation of being a slightly admirable ragamuffin with baggy trousers and a cloth cap jaunty on the side of his head. For some—those who sneakingly envied him because they had the wish but not the guts to flout the established order of things—there was a satisfying quality in Johnnie's roguery. With a magnificent carelessness for civility and the law on the one hand, he had a naive frankness on the other, and a queer humour. Martha Buart had no high opinion of Johnnie, and had told him so to his face before now, but he had only laughed, hitched up his trousers, and walked away whistling in his teeth.

He was whistling that way now, as he walked up alongside Martin. "Yah, men. Yea want to take it easy. Don' worry. T'ings is oright if yoa take den det way."

As they progressed up the street, they came opposite the Eclipse Hairdressing Saloon, a small place in a small, dirty building bordering on the lane which cut its way into the back premises of the surrounding houses and shops. Its windows were empty, excepting a pile of cardboard cartons and an old fly-soiled advertisement for brilliantine. Beneath its swing doors, from which the paint had been worn by many shoulders, men's legs showed. The noise of hair-clippers and scissors, plied as only barbers ply them, was the only indication of the business apparently carried on inside.

In good weather there was always a collection of Coloured men loafing about the Eclipse, particularly in the evenings. They sat at the entrance to the lane, with their backs to the warm wall, or on the edge of the kerb with

their feet in the gutter, smoking, and sending lewd talk after every passing female, guffawing loudly at any spicier comments. They all collected there: the dustmen, the lorry-drivers, the builders' labourers, the handymen, with bottles of the cheapest wine showing from pockets stretched tight to hold them. And among them sauntered Rex, the old shaggy-haired semi-collie dog, who paid attention to none of the passers-by excepting the young policemen who cycled that way on their beat. Toward them he was defiant, barking and snarling with an impudence which was much appreciated by the loafers. They grinned at the discomfiture of the Law, and cackled audibly at its broad back hurrying away down the street. And the policemen could do nothing but carry their anger away with them, to be vented on the first delinquent they might find elsewhere.

When Rex barked, the noise from the barber's shop seemed to come tumbling out into the street at a faster speed.

Because this was Friday night there was the usual large number of loafers around the saloon, in spite of the grey, unpromising sky. Opposite the swing doors of the Eclipse Johnnie stopped and hitched up his trousers.

"Come end hev a hair-cut, men." He chuckled, and flicked the back of Martin's hat with his finger. "Yah, come on men, Baart. It'll give yoa a rest, end do yoa nerves good. Come end sit down so long."

Martin hesitated. But there was no reason for him to stop, and he suddenly felt foolish. He did not need a hair-cut. He mumbled that he must be getting along, and shrugged off Johnnie's company, and with his eyes following a crack in the pavement, he continued up the street.

Johnnie chuckled again and shouted after him, "Some udder time, eh Baart! Come and take yoa mind from worrying." He pushed the swing door open with his shoulder, and entered.

Martin was still irritated as he came up toward the main road. Johnnie seemed to like making a fool of anybody—talking about a hair-cut as if he were inviting one to have a drink, as if it were something amusing. He seemed to twist everything uncomfortably. In any case, Johnnie

looked as if his hair had never been cut in his life; it was as thick and dirty as a goat's. And where did he get the money? He always seemed to be hanging about, doing nothing, like some rich big-oise from up Constantia way.

But this sort of reflection was not what had really kept Martin from staying with Johnnie. All this occurred to him afterwards, when he had left the barber's shop behind and was trying to find his own excuses for going home disgruntled and ill-at-ease.

Among people like the Baarts there is no great warmth of feeling; no deep and spiritual kinship beyond reason, by which people of the same family are drawn together. It is a looser, more casual relationship, a bond of expediency to which each member subscribes for the advantages that it gives: for the man, living with a woman, and the convenience of it; for the woman, a more or less assured livelihood; for the parents, children who will go out at an early age to increase the livelihood; for the children, a more or less substantial roof over their heads, and a sort of parental care in the young years.

But for Martin Baart there was Martha. He possessed a character which had never yet cared to test its own strength. In any situation in which the course of action was not straight or the decision simple, he had always unconsciously turned toward Martha. As if not trusting his own resources, he would look round to see if hers were there to support him. Having neither the quickness nor the boldness of mind to act without hesitation, he would usually defer an act at the first impulse to perform it, and would weigh it in his conscience as he carried it to his mother. As a boy he had always come to Martha and voiced his uncertainties, not by question, but by statement made, ostensibly off-hand, but really with an eye for the slightest shade of approval or disapproval in her answer. It was not a matter of intellect—the weaker soliciting the stronger—for his was the stronger and the finer of the two; but there was a physical comfort about her, an assurance which emanated from her bulk, and from the temperate manner in which all experience seemed to be absorbed by it. Through many years she had become for him a mother

mountain whose rock was solid, whose firmness he had known constantly as a child and now clung to as a near-man.

And Martha's steadfastness did not come from any subtle wisdom, or the understanding that violence and struggle are useless against the disharmonies of an essentially harmonious world. Hers was the quality of cows, and such enduring creatures.

All this was why Martin carried on past the Eclipse, leaving Johnnie, when one part of him wanted to stay. When he arrived home he would give her, as non-committally as he could, the news of another failure, and she, not yet realising the keenness of this particular disappointment, nor the fine edge of his sensibility, would, in her blunt and kindly sympathetic way, say, "Agh, well, never mind, Martin. Yoa'll get a yob soon. Tomorrow, maybe." And he, beginning to feel this was nothing but hollow comfort, would yet, in some manner, feel relieved of half his burden, as if he had shifted it on to her broad back without her knowing.

When he arrived at the cottage, supper was ready. He threw his cap on the chair and slouched through the small front parlour to the room behind, which served as kitchen, pantry, bathroom, and centre of the family's life. Martha was there, and she greeted him.

"So yoa got home before Linda and Yoe. Linda is gorn up to ask for a yob in a big house in Riebeeck Eevenue, and Yoe . . . well, it's Friday night, so yoa never know."

Martin dropped into a chair next to the scrubbed table as Martha turned to stir the soup on the stove. There was a moment's silence.

"Any luck, eh?"

"No."

"Yoa went to see de men who edvertise?"

"Yah."

"But no luck, eh. Yoa didn' like de yob he's got?"

"He didn' offer me the job, mama."

Martha stopped stirring, and turned to him. Her large brown face showed none of her disappointment. Martin raised his head to glance at her for only a second, and then

looked down again. Then Martha's face cracked into a smile.

"No? Agh well . . . dese people . . . dey don't know w'at's good for dem. Tomorrow maybe. Anyway, w'en Linda come, we cen eat so long. Mrs. Borrow is very nice; she got a new washing machine for me to do her washing, end she give me some sausages for supper." She turned to face the stove again, saying, "It don' really metter, eh Martin."

When Linda Baart had walked down the back approach from Riebeeck Avenue to the house called Wintering, and had knocked nervously at the kitchen door, a large face like a chestnut had beamed out at her. Then it had disappeared a moment, and the door had opened and Amy, the cook, had let her in.

"Yoa come for de job? Yoa name is Linda? Miss Baart? O.K. Yest wait by yar. I'll go end tell de medem yoa come. Some more girls was coming dis morning, but . . ." Amy winked and puckered up her lips conspiratorially, as if to give confidence to this lovely, light-skinned girl who looked so nervous as she stood just inside the door.

Linda lowered herself gingerly as Amy disappeared through the door into the main part of the house, and she now sat nervously on the edge of the white kitchen chair waiting for Amy's return. She gazed round the modern, white-tiled kitchen, taking in little of its detail, but being greatly impressed by the general sumptuousness of it. The place was larger and better-equipped than those of any of the other houses in which she had worked before—better, even, than that of the house at St James, where she had been before going to work in the factory. It made her all the more nervous.

Amy returned, and, standing at the open door, she whispered, "Oright, de medem will see yoa now."

Linda rose, full of trepidation. It was always like this when one went in the hope of getting work, but this occasion was bigger than any previous one had been.

She had seldom contemplated becoming a maid in this

suburb of fine houses that looked so imperiously over the dark sweep of valley and up at the dwarfing majesty of the mountain. But now she was here, in one of those houses. She had gone, with a sense of daring, to an agency in the city, almost as nervous as she was now. And after only a few days she had been instructed to present herself to Mrs N. Saunty, at Wintering, Riebeeck Avenue, Mountain View. They had given her a card embossed with the name and address, and had told her to take copies of her testimonials. At first she had scarcely believed that she would be able to leave the factory so soon. Then she had thought, hopelessly, that it was quite impossible, that nothing would come of it. It was too grand a thing, too near what she had wished for: not only to leave the factory, but to work in such a place that she could feel quite separate from the girls there, living vicariously the life of rich people, watching them and copying them.

Linda was young, and conscious of her beauty, conscious that it singled her out from her own people, feckless and unstable and foolish with youth.

As Amy stood holding the kitchen door for her, Linda saw her look of appraisal. She knew those glances; she had seen them before on the faces of people she met and people she passed in the street. In men they meant admiration; in women, envy. Behind her back men would turn round and raise their eyebrows, or whistle. Women would sniff, and she imagined them saying, "She has ideas, that one, with her light skin." She could not escape from herself who was Coloured, and when she put thoughts into other people's minds, they were the thoughts of a Coloured conscious of colour, made conscious of colour by the order of things. Though Amy, with her friendly brown face and her buxom body, looked as if she would not be jealous of any young girl, there was a trace of speculation in her glance.

Linda followed her down the long, carpeted passage. Amy opened a door, stood to one side, and murmured, "Miss Linda, medem." As Linda stepped timidly past her, she closed the door behind, and Linda was left standing there, caught in a sudden fear.

"Come in, Miss Baart. That is your name, is it?"

Beneath her nervousness Linda was vaguely annoyed by this—the agency had given this woman her name. But the sight of the room so awed her, that her resentment immediately vanished. And the voice, impersonal but not cold, excited a feeling of pleasure in her. Already it all began to touch her dreams of grandeur, for so in her dreams did women of grace speak.

Mrs Saunty, beautifully dressed, was seated at one end of a settee upholstered in dark green brocade. The whole room was furnished tastefully and elegantly. Mrs Saunty herself was fairly young—about thirty-five. She was not naturally beautiful; her features were too angular, her jaw too prominent, and her eyes without warmth. The groomed elegance of her face and her dress would make men turn to admire her, but no more.

She removed her reading spectacles and put them down with her book.

"You're a housemaid, Linda?"

"Yes medem."

Gloria Saunty noticed that the girl's speech was not as clipped as Amy's, and that her voice was softer.

"The agency told me you'd bring your testimonials from previous employers."

"Yes medem, I hev them here."

The hand that stretched out for them was beautifully cared for. Linda drew the testimonials from her bag and walked across diffidently, and having handed over the papers she stood back a step or so while the spectacles were re-adjusted and her record examined.

"You've not worked in this neighbourhood before?"

"No medem."

"Your last place was at St James?" Mrs Saunty did not look up, but continued to read. "This is dated June, Linda. You've not worked for . . . three months?"

Linda had been waiting for this question, knowing and dreading that it would come, but hoping that somehow it would not. The last three months, and the explanation of why at the end of them she had again sought work as a housemaid, were a subject that she would have preferred

to avoid just now. She hesitated before stammering, "Yes . . . I hev worked in thet time, medem."

"I see." From the tone of Mrs Saunty's voice she apparently did not. She was waiting.

"I . . . worked in a fectory, medem . . . in a cigarette fectory."

The information may have seemed harmless enough, but Linda was not happy about giving it. With Mrs Saunty's eyes on her, however, she felt compelled. Here, in Mountain View, in this house where the highest standards were set and where the service was obviously exacting, it seemed to spoil any chance she had. Immediately she had said it she felt hopelessly that she might just as well never have come. A good housemaid does not quit her job to go and work in a cigarette factory. Out of the moment's silence that followed the words, she suddenly wished to blurt out her story, but Mrs Saunty looked up at her and spoke:

"Why did you discontinue domestic service?"

It was not her manner that intimidated Linda—that surprisingly showed more curiosity than censure—it was her language. To be confronted with words and usage she knew but never used, as if they belonged to a language she understood but could not speak, was disconcerting. It brought Linda into a circle that was unfamiliar, where she must be on her guard because her differentness was suddenly so much more apparent. She felt miserably ill-at-ease.

"I . . . my friends, medem. They all worked at the fectory. And there was more money working there."

"Your friends were earning more than you were? It's awkward when that happens, isn't it?"

This sudden and unexpected sign of understanding and sympathy took Linda a little by surprise, but she hardly realised it until she saw a faint smile on Mrs Saunty's face.

"Where was the factory? What did you do?"

Linda felt a surge of relief. "The Liesbeeck Tobacco Company, medem. In Woodstock. I was working in the pecking department."

"And . . . ah, Nicholas! You're home early."

Mrs Saunty's greeting was for someone who entered the room behind Linda. As she spoke, Linda moved aside self-consciously, and glanced half-round. She heard the newcomer stop at the door as he realised the situation.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I'm interrupting you. I'll come back."

Gloria Saunty's expression became less wifely and more conventionally that of mistress of the house, since it was not entirely proper to come down from that station when interviewing the Coloured girl who might become the housemaid. Her smile was therefore less intimate as she answered.

"No, you needn't go away. We shan't be long." She nodded to Linda. "This is Mr Saunty, Linda." And to her husband, "Linda has come from the agency, Nicholas. She was just telling me about herself."

As Nicholas Saunty came into full view of Linda, she saw that he was of middle height, rather squarely built. His face was more lively than his wife's; his eyes more alive under dark brows, and softer; his mouth more generous; and his chin rounder, with a small cleft. It was a face that displayed a less inhibited eagerness toward life, being ready to light up with excitement, either pleasant or angry. His hair was dark, and fell on his forehead in a short lock that made him look younger than his wife. His smile was less remote than hers. But his well-cut suit, his white shirt, and silk tie, made the same impression on Linda as the elegance of Mrs Saunty and of the house itself did.

Linda's discomfort was increased by the presence of the two of them, and more than ever she felt out of her depth. When Mrs Saunty had said to him, "We shan't be long," Linda had felt, with a sensibility uncommon in her, that what the woman had meant was—"I'll be finished with this girl in a minute. Wait while I get the business over . . ."—like buying eggs.

Nicholas Saunty walked across to the far side of the room and stood looking through the doors that led on to a broad terrace.

"Yes, Linda. . . . You worked in a tobacco factory for a few months. But didn't you like it? What made you decide to leave it and return to domestic work?"



This was what Linda had not wanted to tell. . . . Why had she wanted to leave behind her the cattiness of the girls at the factory, the clumsy innuendoes, all inspired by jealousy? Why did she despair of ever being taken as one of them, of not being singled out from them and by them, and envied for her singularity? Why in the first place had she been given a light skin to taunt them and bewilder herself—been thrown out like a bright flower from the stem of her own people? She was not sufficiently aware of the questions herself to formulate them; she was only aware of the bewilderment.

"I . . . I found it was not what I like, medem. I found I rather work as a maid. I like it more." With a sudden desperation she added, "I *do*, medem! End I'm trained well! Mrs Forsdyke at St James taught me well, medem! . . . End it was a waste of it all in the factory!" She stopped suddenly, embarrassed by her outburst. She saw from the corner of her eye that Mr Saunty had turned from the window and was looking toward them.

Mrs Saunty smiled, and rose to her feet. "Well, thank you, Linda. I think that's all." As she walked to the wall and pressed the bell, Linda stood aside anxiously. Suddenly she wanted to cry, to take Mrs Saunty by the arm and beg her to be kind.

"Perhaps you might let me keep the copies of your testimonials for a day or so, Linda. I'll let you know in . . . I'll let you know tomorrow. Would that be all right? I have your address, haven't I?"

Being so dismissed, Linda turned toward the door, which Amy had come to open. She hesitated before leaving, but then she ventured to add, "Er . . . yoa cen telephone, medem. Mr Isaac, in the shop by my mother's house, can let me know." It heartened her to be able to say this, for it was almost as good as being able to say they had a telephone at the cottage. Mr Isaac, the old shopkeeper, never objected to taking messages for Martha Baart and the people in the other cottages.

Mrs Saunty looked a little surprised, then smiled. "Oh, I see. Yes, well then I'll 'phone a message to you. That'll be splendid. The number."

"I can't. . . . It's in the book, medem, but I can't remember."

"Oh well, that's all right. Mr Isaac's shop—I shall find it. That's all right then, Lin/a. I'll let you know. Thank you for coming."

"Yes medem. Thank you."

She backed her way out through the open door, and followed Amy back to the kitchen.

When she had gone, Nicholas Saunty went across and kissed his wife's forehead. "She's a strange girl."

"Yes, she is. She has very good testimonials—only two, because she was at each place for fairly long periods. And she's certainly very clean, and looks intelligent. But . . ."

"But she seemed a little hesitant when it came to her job at the factory—is that it?"

"Yes."

"How in earth did the factory come into it, in any case? We want a housemaid."

"Apparently she was in domestic service before—she always had been. But she left it a few months ago, because all her friends were earning more by making cigarettes."

"It sounds reasonable enough."

"I suppose it does, really. And now she wants to get back to her old work—but you heard that part of it. She seems very earnest, don't you think?"

"She does." Nicholas grinned as he walked slowly back toward the window. "Refreshing, isn't it? Work of the heart before wages."

Gloria glanced across at him but did not answer, for she knew she was not expected to.

"I'd be glad if you could ring up, Nicholas—the factory, I mean. They'll be able to tell you if there's anything in her leaving. I'm almost inclined to let it remain, and send her a message that we're sorry."

"No, let's not do that. I'll ring the place. I might catch them now."

Nicholas went to the hall, and telephoned immediately, and after some delay he spoke to the staff supervisor. Appearing to be satisfied with what information was given

him, as if it were what he wanted to hear, he returned to Gloria.

"Well, darling, that end of it seems to be all right. They couldn't say much about her, but as far as I can make out, she was apparently quite satisfactory. They had no black marks against her. Then only a day or so ago she simply gave notice and left. Were there any other applicants?"

"Yes, but no one impressive."

As he walked back to the door which looked over the terrace, Nicholas shrugged. He seemed to lose interest. "Oh well, darling, it's up to you."

"But I'm glad you were here, Nicholas. It makes it much easier for me. I'll send a message down to her tomorrow, and she can start immediately."

She rose to leave. Nicholas remained at the door leading on to the terrace, looking across at the mountain.

There was nothing in the afternoon to raise Linda's hopes as she came out of Wintering and turned down the tree-lined avenues. It was as dull and cautious as they were, as congenial to them as it had been to Martin's mood when he had walked up from the station. It was only as she neared home, after hammering out her recollection of the last few minutes with Mrs Saunty, that she gained some confidence.

. . . They wouldn't have kept the testimonials if they didn't want me. They *do* want me! They *do*! Oh, please God! They would have told me, without wasting time. But then . . . She cast her mind's eye back to the look on Mrs Saunty's face as she had asked about the factory, and her confidence ebbed again. Unconsciously she began to walk slower. At the next corner she turned off from the direct route to the cottage, and lingered a little as she came to the lower road, down through the solitary avenues, toward the woods in the valley. Engrossed in her own thoughts, she was heedful of her going, across the bridge and up past Isaac's Provision Store. More and more she longed for the job at Wintering, with Amy, and the large, cool kitchen, and the gracious house that was like another, distant existence. The thought of getting the job made her

buoyant; that of losing it the more depressed. On this seesaw of emotions she came home.

"Harro, Linda." Francis greeted her from the doorway, with the shyness which he had never overcome toward his sister. He stood as shy children do, with his hands behind his back and his head slightly bent, so that he looked at her through his top lashes. His sharp-featured little face, like a terrier's with its large brown eyes, had a smile that for a moment enchanted her and lightened her heart of its pondering. He turned and skipped indoors in front of her.

"Mama, Linda is come back! Cen we hev supper now?"

Martha's voice came through from the kitchen. "Come in, Linda, and tell us how it was."

Martha herself appeared in the doorway, her great, large-bosomed, unshapely figure filling its width. To see her mother like that, suddenly appearing in her own thoughts, gave Linda a feeling at the same time of comfort and of distaste; for Martha's deep-creased, tolerant eyes, and the good nature in the grin which broadened her face, were a soothing assurance; but her appearance in these surroundings created a repugnance--the faded blue print dress with sleeves rolled, the carpet slippers, the wispy black hair, the gap-toothed gums, the faint moustache of dark hair on the top lip, and the hair-sprouting mole on the chin.

"Come along in, Linda. Martin is also come home. Yoa cen make some cawffee so long, while I'm finishing de stew."

Linda and Martin greeted each other with some reserve, and Martin rose to leave his mother and sister to their own talk, while Francis hung about to hear Linda's news. Martha shouted after her son:

"Don' go far away, Martin. De supper is yest about ready, and we hot waiting for yoa papa. Well? It's alright?" Directing this question at Linda, Martha turned her attention back to the stove.

"I don' know, mama. Mrs Saunty asked me quite a few questions. Then they kept my papers, and she told me they will send a message tomorrow."

"Yah. Dey orlways do like det. Dey 'phone to de larst place yoa work, end arsk if yoa been good. But det's oright, yoa got good referenses. It's a big house? Dey nice people?"

"It's very big end they seem to be very nice." Linda's hope revived with Martha's unconcerned assurance, for Martha knew from experience.

"End dey got udder servants?"

"One more at least. Her name is Amy, end she's a cook. She's nice. She talked to me a little when I was leaving."

"Good. I t'ink it's prob'ly oright. Yoa'll see tomorrow. But for Martin . . . I don' know." She shook her head slowly.

Linda could not see her mother's face, but the tone of her voice, and in some way the curve of her back, told her feeling. Martin had always been nearest to the heart of their mother.

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Joe Baart was a large man, with his belt hanging to the undercurve of his belly. His face, as large and brown as a new football, had never been seen to show despair; only momentary annoyances had ever spoiled its expression of good humour. His shiny brown pate, fringed with a black encircling down, made him look like a glad Chaucerian friar, or a brown Cæsar crowned for merry-making. But Joe was a painter—of benches, railings and public lavatories on suburban stations. He was content; he saw a different station each week, from Adderley Street to Simonstown; he watched the trains go by, and to and from his work he travelled on them free. And near every station was an hotel, and he knew and enjoyed the fellowship of the Non-European bar of every one of them.

Near the station at Kalk Bay was the Pomfrey Hotel, and on that Friday evening, after work, Joe Baart was there. Joe liked Kalk Bay especially, for the fishermen were his friends. He enjoyed the talk that filled the bar there on Friday nights, and the smell of it all—the paint on his old trousers, the fish and the sea-salt, and the beer.

At the moment he was hemmed in by it, basking in its congeniality.

"Men, Yoe, yoa carn't lose^f I hear it straight from de horse's mout'."

"Yah, but I've heard det one before, Piet, and de bleddy horse was talking t'rough his het."

From his corner seat Joe grinned up at his informant, who was redolent of fish.

Piet shook his head emphatically and wagged his finger in Joe's face. "Agh, but dis time I'm sure!"

"Oright. Maybe I'll give him a try, maybe not. I'll t'ink about it, Piet—maybe harf a crown for a place."

Piet looked round at the surrounding crowd in disgust and resignation. "Det's de bleddy t'enks yoa get! De best tip for a mont', end Yoe Baart puts maybe harf-a-crown! Oud Baart, he don' ever take a bleddy charnce!"

Joe stretched himself on the bench, and announced that he must go. "Time for food. Carn't keep de missus waiting too long."

But when someone put a hand on his shoulder and pushed him back on to the seat, he did not object.

"Nie men, Baart, sit! Plenty of time for food."

"Yah, but not plenty of money! Don' take no money home on Friday, end yoa don' get no food for a week!"

Someone in the crowd supported him warmly. "Det's so, too. De bleddy women! . . ."

"End yoa try to get a little more money, and de oud woman say no, yoa got to stay home end mend de furniture or some bleddy nonsense like det. I wanted to go over to Hout Bay tomorrow to fish wid Frikkie Kockstra on his boat . . . but no!" Joe shook his head in disgust.

Some new voice made an offer from the crowd. "Oright, Yoe, yoa want to come out on a boat? Come tomorrow night on ours."

Some other voice chimed in. "Nie, got! Yoa go on Dassie's boat end yoa don' see a bleddy fish in de sea. De fish hate Dassie."

Dassie, sitting next to Joe, was small and wiry, and he replied to his detractor with a venomous, "Agh, voetsak, yoa!"

This exchange of offers and compliments subsided into the general hubbub of the bar, as other voices rose for the moment to drown it.

And, despite his announcement, Joe continued to sit. He was content that way, to join in the babble and stretch his legs under the table, and relax. As time went on the light faded outside, and the noise and the smoke in the bar thickened. This was the time that Joe loved, with the week almost over and the week-end already putting its glow on everything, with money in his pocket, and the company of the boys.

"Men, her face is like a fish's, but her tits is like velvet! Out by de rocks over by Seafort' . . ."

" . . . Yoa should be dere, men! It's a bleddy scream! De policeman come up w'en Jannie end Pampoen is fighting like a cet, end w'en he tries to stop dem dey turns round end klonks him on de kop wid a bottle—end runs so farst, yoa don' know! . . ."

" . . . Talking about de police, yoa should see Pampoen wid a bleddy big stick w'en de police get scared, de night w'en dey hev a riot in Church Square . . ."

" . . . I'm telling yoa, Frikkie, it's a good bet, no metter w'at Yoe Baart say! De best I ever know for a long time. It's easy money . . .!"

" . . . Agh, Christ, men, I'm not talking about de fishing on de rocks by Seafort. Orl yoa got in yoa head is fishing. I'm talking about—ah, *got*, yoa don' unnerstend. . . ."

Eventually, and with great reluctance, Joe rose in the middle of it all, and shaking his head with a grin as they tried to prevent him from leaving, he began to edge his way out of the corner into the middle of the crowded floor. But he had gone only a few feet when someone turned and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Baart, men, *hoe gaan dit!* We didn' see yoa for a long time! Yoa been here orl de time? Look, dis silly barstard, Fennie, try to say Stellenbos cen beat Varsity tomorrow—de larst game in de season . . .!" And Joe found himself in the middle of an argument on rugby, not unwillingly, for no one followed the game with more enthusiasm than he. The argument rambled and extended, until half the place

was taking part in it. Some of the voices were by now becoming more assertive, and others more indistinct and furry. Piet Mathers, edging his way past, shouted in Joe's ear, "So yoa got no bleddy money, eh! Don' forget what I tell yoa about de horse for tomorrow!" Without turning round, Joe grinned, and waved to him in the middle of a sentence.

It was now dark outside, and eventually he tore himself away, and with one of the others in the crowd, who happened to move to the door at the same time as him, he left amid shouts of good-night. At the door the two of them looked at each other, and though they had never so much as seen each other before, they grinned benignly and walked out into the street arm-in-arm. Outside in the cool sea air the two of them walked ponderously across the road to the station.

Beyond the railway there was nothing. The bay joined its darkness to the night, and only the lap and the surge of the surf on the rocks beyond the wall told that the sea lay there. Over to the right a light, poised somewhere, sent its long reflection across the still water of the little harbour. Behind them the lights of the houses terraced the slope of the hill. Inside the wall of the sea's noise there was quiet.

Very soon a train sirened its way round the curve of the harbour, and Joe and his companion ran sedately to catch it in the station. They bustled windily along the platform, opening doors and shutting them again as too many faces stared out at them. Eventually they found a place, and they slumped down opposite each other just as the train gathered way. The other man peered owlishly at Joe for a moment, and then, murmuring "Good-night, kerel," fell fast asleep. Half an hour or so later Joe stepped down at his station, and as the train moved out he turned and waved to the sleeping figure, whom he never saw again. Then he stood a moment, raised his eyebrows, shrugged, and went through the station to the street.

There was a light behind Isaac's Provision Store as Joe walked past. Isaac would be there having a lonely meal, for he lived without company and without friends. And farther up the road another light shone, from the Sapeikas'

cottage. It was certain that Benjie Sapeika would not be home yet, and Joe hazily pictured Annie, his fat old wife, sitting there alone, sewing. Annie was always sewing—when she was not shadowing Martha—in order to earn a little to make up for what Benjie failed to bring home on Fridays and what her daughter, Nellie, failed to provide out of her wages as a housemaid at Rondebosch.

When Joe arrived at the gate of his own cottage there was no light inside, but Joe did not mind the dark reception. Martha and the two older children would be out somewhere. Joe entered, humming tunelessly, but suddenly remembering that Francis would be asleep he hushed himself with an exaggerated gesture. He lit a lamp, walked through to the back room, took a scarcely-warm plate of food from the oven, and sat down to add substance to what he had already consumed that evening. Having finished it, he belched, and went to bed.

But tonight Annie was not alone. Martha was with her, for she had gone there after supper to see how Annie had stood up to the long walk to Redhill and back, and had found her friend exhausted and unfed, lying almost helpless on the worn sofa in the darkened cottage, and she had stayed to prepare some food and make Annie comfortable. When Joe passed up the road she was sitting by Annie's bed, keeping her company. A few minutes earlier, when she had cleared the dishes away, had tucked Annie between the sparse blankets, and had prepared to leave, Annie had begged her to stay, and Martha, being unable to resist the mumbled pleading, was there still. Because Annie lay in a silent daze Martha had looked about the cottage for some mending, and now she sat doing her friend's work for her.

Annie stirred a little, and spoke in little more than a whisper: "I'm sorry to be a trouble, Mart'a."

"Agh, no trouble, Ennie. It's my fault anyway. I shouldn' let yoa walk 'orl up to Redhill. De districk nurse say it's bed for yoa, so it's my fault to take yoa."

"Oh no!" There was animation in Annie's voice as she said it. "I like it. It was a lovely change. Mart'a . . . I got no company, on'y yoa. Benjie don' care. He's not caring

for a long time—twenty-five . . . t'irty years. A long time ago I wasn' fet and ugly, but now I'm no good for him. End Nellie, too, she don' care. She don' come home a lot —on'y to say harro, end den she's gorn again. . . .”

“Ennie, don' be silly, men! End yoa mustn't talk. Yoa must sleep.”

“But I *know*, Mart'a. I know it for a long time. Dey don' want yoa w'en yoa oud.”

Martha was at a loss for oncé. She could only answer, “No, Ennie, yoa talking nonsense.”

“But I'm not unheppy, Mart'a.” The voice came slowly and quietly. “End it's not long to go now.”

Martha looked across at the flabby face, at the eyelids that were puffed and heavy. The face bore a quiet smile which made it pitifully ugly. Martha sat, outwardly stolid, but inwardly touched with a powerless compassion. At length the eyes closed, and the slow, steady breathing told that Annie was asleep.

The cottage was dark and silent again when Martha returned home, when Linda came in silently with tomorrow large in her thoughts, and when Martin slouched to his bed, having no joy in his tomorrow.

Chapter 2

THE mountain was impassive. The elements played about it, the clouds dappled the sunlight on it, but it gave no sign of what the day would be like. Nor was the wind helpful, coming slant-wise over Constantia Nek from the low Atlantic, for it might swing either way, letting the wet clouds come down from the north, or an early breeze come herald of summer from the south-east. In the cramped cottages among the pine and oak trees things were in the balance. There was no foretelling the day.

Linda had been in suspense through most of the night, and continuously since the house had awakened early in the morning. Being absent-minded as she made porridge, she had burned it, but had eaten it without caring. When Martha had said that Annie was sick again, perhaps badly this time, and had gone off to give help, Linda had not been very touched, and had not even remembered to send her good wishes. When Martha had gone she had picked up a duster and had flicked it indifferently at the dustless places. In the middle of her duties, before she had done half what she knew must be done about the house, she found herself at the doorway, leaning limply against the door-frame, one round hip provoking the glances of men who passed by on the road. But it was no pose adopted deliberately by her to provoke them, for she was unaware of her own beauty as she stood facing half outward toward the indeterminate day, and half inward toward the small, crowded room where the furniture stood about like sardonic people watching.

When she saw Francis come running from the direction of the store, she straightened up quickly and excitedly, guessing that he had the message she was waiting for. He rushed through the small gate and grinned up at her.

"Telephone for you, Linda. Et Mr Isaac's . . ."

Linda took a quick step forward, but Francis interrupted, and stopped her. "No, it's oright. Mr Isaac take a message. He says yoa got to go to de house yoa been to yesterday, to work, end please to take yoa clothes en t'ings, to stay dere. De medem phone."

The duster waved violently as she flung it away, and then it dropped lifeless again on the floor as she turned and ran into the other room to put on the coat which she had placed ready on a chair. As she was putting it on, however, she checked herself suddenly and turned to her brother with a sudden misgiving.

"But now, Francis? Right away?"

"Yah, Linda, Mr Isaac says now. Dis morning."

Hardly waiting for him to say it, Linda seized the small case which was also waiting ready, and into it she threw a few last things which she would need for the next few days—there was no time for everything now, and she could collect the rest of her things some other day. In a few minutes she was hurrying out of the cottage and turning down the road among the trees, with Francis running in front of her as far as the Sapeikas' cottage. She could hardly spare the time to call in to tell Martha that she was going, but she could not leave without doing so. In her present excitement it suddenly became distasteful to her to have to enter the house where Annie Sapeika was sick. At any time she would have disliked it—the unfresh air, the close, squalid smell of the sick, the irrational fear and abhorrence of things that are near death—but now in her eagerness the place was especially disagreeable. She stopped at the doorway, and leaning through, she said in a low, urgent voice, half a whisper, "Mama, I'm going! Mama!"

Martha appeared from the back room.

"Mama, I'm going now. A message came from Mr Isaac."

Martha smiled. "Yah, I know, Francis tol' me. I'm gled, Linda."

"I'll come beck es soon es I get time off, end I'll tell yoa about it, Mama. I hev to come beck some time to fetch more clothes. So long, Mama." Then Linda turned

quickly and hurried away toward the bridge. It was not until she had passed it and was well on her way that she remembered with some shame that she had not even asked how Annie was, nor paid her respects. She checked herself a moment, then as she started off again she felt a little chastened. And as she came nearer Wintering her pace slowed even more as her attention switched to composing herself for her arrival. She came to a place where a dirt path turned up from the road in the direction of Riebeeck Avenue, but though it was a shorter way, and would have taken her to Wintering sooner than by following the road and the avenues, she hesitated; it would put dust on her clean white shoes. She turned back to the road and made her way to Wintering the long way round.

Amy met her again at the back door of the house.

"Yoa come quick, Linda. Yoa not living far away?"

Her broad face wore a frank, open smile, with none of the reserve which it had shown the day before, when Linda had come, a stranger, not yet part of the household. Now, this slim, light-skinned straight-raven-haired girl had come for good, and having been approved by Mrs Saunty, she was now accepted by Amy. Linda sensed this friendly welcome and the desire for good relations that lay behind it, and she warmed to it as Amy spoke.

"I'm gled yoa come," Amy went on, as if sensing the question that was in Linda's mind. "I t'ink yoa'll like it here. De medem is nice—maybe a little . . . er . . . proud—yah, proud. She don' talk much to de servants, but she's not narsty. De udder maid what is yest gorn was not very nice—too cheeky, so de medem give her pay instead of notice, end send her away. End marster Saunty is very nice. He orlways says harro, nice end friendly."

The inner door of the kitchen opened and a young girl—little more than a child—entered from the main part of the house, wearing a small apron and cap.

"Dis is Bert'a. She's my daughter. She's working here, learning to be a maid. Mrs Saunty let her work in de house to learn. Bert'a, dis is Linda, who yest come to start working."

Bertha, young and gauche, glanced shyly at Linda and

smiled, and then stood awkwardly for a moment before passing through the kitchen and out to the back.

As Linda saw Bertha's shy smile, and felt Amy's new expansiveness, she looked round at the clean kitchen and warmed to it all.

"I'm going to tell medem yoa come, Linda. Yest wait a minute." Amy disappeared through the inner door, but in a few moments she was back again.

"Oright." Amy led the way again, to the same room as before. As they entered the room, Mrs Saunty turned from the open door which led out on to the terrace, her smile a little detached this time, unconsciously telling of the new and established relationship.

"Good morning, Linda. I'm glad you were able to get here so soon. You were very prompt. Now, Amy will show you around and give you a preliminary idea of your work. . . ."

So Linda came to Wintering.

Chapter 3

ANNIE SAPEIKA had suffered much, over a long time; she was, indeed, always suffering, not acutely, nor with a positive pain, but passively, her fat, ageing, sexless body encumbered by the weariness of her sorrowful mind. She was loved neither by her husband nor by her daughter, being for the husband too old, like an old banjo overplayed, misused, damaged, discarded; and being for the daughter a nuisance. Benjie Sapeika had for a long time gone to find his pleasures elsewhere, returning home irregularly to sleep and eat. Nellie Sapeika came to the dingy cottage only when she happened to be near by, and then only when she could spare the time from her unceasing pre-occupation with the young men of the neighbourhood.

Benjie was large and ungainly, without sensibilities. His disregard for the thoughts and feelings of others—especially of Annie—was an innocent lack, that of an incomplete mind, created imperfect in its understanding of his obligations. Benjie was a simple lout.

So Annie bore a constant melancholy that had dulled her brain and sapped the vitality from her body. With little money coming to her from Benjie and Nellie, she had for a long time gone out to char daily, walking with Martha each morning down the long road to the bus stop. As she had begun to ail, she had been forced to stop working regularly, and Isaac, the good storekeeper, had allowed her to come in and potter about his rooms for a few hours each day. In the evening she would sew. Then, some months back, when she had had a heart attack, and had been kept in bed by the combined insistence of Martha and the district nurse, Benjie had avoided the cottage for days on end, and Nellie had practically ceased to come at all.

Benjie did not return home that Friday night, when Annie had collapsed and Martha had come to her help;

and he would still not have returned even if he had known of her serious illness. Nor did Martha expect that he would return, for she knew his habits too well. He might stay away until Sunday, and then he would come back with his pockets empty.

All the next day Annie lay motionless in the cottage, outwardly calm and resigned, but inwardly distressed, reviewing in the greyness of her mind her own loneliness and hopelessness, and praying to God for someone to come who might lighten her anguish—not merely Martha, who gave her a sort of comfort, but someone of her own, to show that she was not alone, that she might not die unnoticed. Martha came often, and during the Saturday morning the nurse came at old Isaac's bidding. But their kindness did not touch the core of Annie's heart. Late in the afternoon, when Martha was at home and Annie was alone for a while, when the valley was in twilight, and there was a smell of wood-smoke among the trees, Annie struggled to the edge of her bed and pulled herself painfully to her feet. She had no purpose in her mind, only a longing. If she could only move out, someone—Benjie—might come to meet her. It was as if she were stretching out her hand for someone to clasp. . . .

Where the road sloped upward from the bridge, Benjie slid from his bicycle and began to walk, wheeling it beside him. He was in no hurry. He did not really know why he was coming to the cottage at all, except that he had quarrelled with the woman at whose house he had spent the previous night. He kicked wider the half-open gate, and walking across the meagre garden patch, he propped the bicycle against the wall, feeling that he would probably want it again later. From the outside the place looked deserted. The door was shut, and the two windows on either side of it had the cataracted stare of the close-curtained houses of these people. Benjie opened the door, and after standing for a moment on the threshold while his eyes accustomed themselves to the semi-darkness, he shouted his usual greeting:

“Ennie! . . . Ennie! . . . Yoa bleddy . . . *waar* . . .?”

Just as Annie moaned, his eyes picked her out in the

poor light. She was half-lying, half-sitting on one of the chairs.

"Watsa metter? Eh? Watsa metter? Sleeping? Becorse I'm hungry. . . ."

Annie only moaned in answer. She lay as if she had fallen when trying to lower herself into the chair, with one leg stretched awkwardly across the floor. Benjie came nearer and peered down at her. Annie's eyes seemed not to focus on him properly, for there was in them that pained and uncontrolled look of the dreadfully sick, a look impersonal with pain. Her face was haggard, and frightening in its rabbiness, and her breathing was coarse. One arm was folded awkwardly under her, but she made no effort to put it right. She fumbled for speech with a mouth made sloppy by pain. In her weak and wretched body Annie's mind lit up with joy to see her husband. She thought—more hoped than thought—that he had come at last and would be for once a solace to her. Pitifully the spirit alive in her was glad; pathetically it rejoiced above the pain. Benjie had come to be with her.

But still her eyes could not focus to show her gladness. Benjie, faced with this sudden crisis, was appalled, somehow sensing in his blunt, insensate mind the dreadfulfulness of her near-death, her remoteness from the sphere of living. And he wished to have no connection with so fearful a thing. He was afraid, afraid of being involved beyond his understanding, afraid of sickness, and of death which is its end. In this state Annie, mute and helpless, was to him as good as dead, and to him death was fearful because it was so final and unfathomable.

Each stared at the other for a moment, she full of pain and shock and struggling for happiness, he afraid of death that showed in this useless, stricken body which he had once known and loved. Faced with it in this way, he was afraid even of coming near, of being dragged in, like a child afraid of the dark current of a river. He turned about suddenly, whimpering like a child, and rushed out through the door.

Behind him Annie tried to call out, but could not, tried to move, but could only scrape her leg along the floor.

When through her dull eyes she saw her husband vanish through the door, her body sank deeper into the chair and her spirit lost its spark.

Benjie seized his bicycle and pushed it quickly through the gate into the road. He turned it in the direction of the town and leapt on, but he rode hung-head, letting the bicycle go on its own, reluctant to push it and take a part in its going, for there was already in him the shame of his repudiation. Having been carried to the lowest part of the road, where it crossed the bridge and began to rise toward the European houses, he slid from the seat, and for a few moments he stood with the bicycle leaning against him. Then, turning, not being led by any force of goodness, but with the same involition as a change of the wind from north to east, he walked back up the road now darkening under the heavy trees, past the store, and past the gate of his cottage with a sidelong look, to Martha Baart's. He let the bicycle fall softly to the ground outside the gate, and approached the door. For a while, as he stood outside, his eyes on the lighted window, he was on the brink of turning and leaving; to escape from this frightening responsibility which had been thrust on him, and from his own shame. But he found himself knocking at the door. When it was opened, and Martha Baart stood there, he faltered.

"Ennie . . ." He looked down at his shoes. "Ennie is sick. Like she was once before. You know. She's looking bed. . . ."

Martha gave an unsympathetic scowl. "Yah, I know. I been to de house most of today; end I'm going beck yest now."

"Oh. . . . It's oright den?"

"Oright! Got no! It's not oright, Benjie Sapeika! I put her in bed, end she got to stay dere."

Benjie could not bear to stay any longer. "But now she's not in bed. She's on de chair now, half on de floor. . . ."

Suddenly he backed away from the door and fled through the gate, picked up his bicycle, and rode fiercely down the road. He rode madly, with the wind thundering in his ears out of the silence that sank back into the night.

He did not stop until he was a long way down into the town, where the traffic thickened.

Martha stared after him in astonishment for a second. She cursed Benjie under her breath, and then she shouted toward the kitchen:

"Francis! Yoa go to bed when yoa finished yoa supper! I'm coming beck in maybe harf en hotir!"

She turned back to the door, and hurried down the road to the Sapeilas' cottage, where she found Annie slumped on the chair as Benjie had left her. Annie showed no sign of interest as Martha swept in and urged her to get up and return to bed. When Martha came near and saw Annie's state she stopped, clucked angrily with her tongue, then stooped and took Annie as gently as she could by the arms, and lifted her to her feet. Annie had hardly any strength in her legs as Martha supported her across the room, lifted her back on to the bed, and covered her with the shabby blankets.

As Martha fussed about and made Annie comfortable, Francis appeared in the doorway. Martha saw him, and hissed fiercely at him:

"Francis! Who said for yoa to come? I told yoa to go to bed. Go on! Hurry up! . . . No! No, yest wait. . . . Oright, make some tea, in de kitchen."

Francis hurried along, relieved at being pardoned, and proud of the responsibility suddenly thrust on to him. For some while after that he was kept busy, running up to the cottage for the old hot-water bottle, then for bread and cold sausages for Martha to eat. But there was little to be done once Annie was settled into her bed again and given a warm drink. Standing wide-eyed in the doorway of the room, Francis watched Martha make the sick woman comfortable. Then, when Annie was lying back as comfortably as possible, he took Martha's outstretched hand and walked with her to their own cottage, excited and perplexed in his young mind by all this which concerned strange tragedy and the failing of a life.

For Martha there was little rest that night. Twice she awoke from her light sleep and crept down to the cottage to visit Annie and satisfy herself that her friend was comfortable.

The next morning she sent Francis to Mr Isaac, to ask if he would 'phone for the district nurse, Miss Smit; and in a short while that plump, capable woman arrived. Directly she entered the cottage she went to Annie, and Martha, who waited in the next room, listened intently for any noise. After, what seemed to Martha a long time Miss Smit walked out, frowning and shaking her head. She raised her eyebrows at Martha before speaking.

"She's been doing too much, and she's been excited." She shook her head again and the kindly brown eyes had a look as if with her lay the lives and happiness of all these people. "She's been excited."

Hesitating slightly, but with directness, and without evasion, Martha replied:

"I . . . we been to Redhill, sister. Francis end me was going, end Ennie wanted to come. She was so sed w'en I tol' her no. So she came wid us."

"That was wicked of you Mrs Baart—to let her go. You should have known." But there was no anger in Miss Smit's voice, nor in her look.

Martha's face showed her own distress. "But she wanted to come, Miss Smit. She looked so sed w'en I told her she carn't come, end she enjoyed it so much wh'n she was dere, yest sitting by de rock orl day."

The nurse's features softened as she smiled tolerantly. "Yes, all right, Mrs Baart; it wasn't your fault." She paused. "Perhaps it's as well."

During the night Annie did not respond to nursing. And she lingered through the following morning, stirring weakly now and then, and mumbling unintelligibly, indifferent to all that went on around her. During the morning Mr Isaac sent across three tins of soup as a present, but she would eat nothing.

Just before noon Nellie Supeika appeared at the door, hesitant, and clearly nervous. She had come from Rondebosch on her day off in the hope of being picked up by any one of the boys who was prepared to spend the day with her. Down the road she had heard of her mother's illness, and at length she had come, unwillingly. She was practical enough to know that her presence would do no good,

and unkind enough to plead this with her conscience. But she had come in the end, intending to stay only for a few moments. Martha turned to see her standing like a beggar by the door—a short, smudgy-faced girl, with her frizzy hair piled up over her forehead, and her skirt hanging unevenly just above her thick brown knees.

Martha's scowl offered her no welcome. "Oh, it's yoa, Nellie! Yoa mama is in bed, sick."

Nellie could not find anything to say for a moment, but then, covering her nervousness with defiance, she pouted disrespectfully. "Yah, I know. So I come to see her."

"She been sick for two days now. Yoa come in a hurry, eh."

"I didn' know she was sick."

"Yoa never know! . . . End yoa papa, he's not here. Yoa mama is getting no help from him." Beneath her breath, but audibly, Martha murmured, "Because he's yest a bleddy drunk and a skellum." Her eyes flashed with contempt, and her huge body seemed to quiver with it. "Well, yoa com'ug in to see yoa mania? P'reps she like to see yoa."

Nellie did not move.

"Yoa scared? Come on. I'm going out, so yoa cen see her by yoaself."

"I yest . . ." Nellie did not complete whatever she had meant to say, but she advanced with an uncertain defiance. Now, confronted with the presence of sickness and death, she felt as her father had felt, unwilling to be dragged in. It had nothing to do with her. It was only because Martha remained there, waiting to see what she would do, that she entered.

Annie, lying mufe on her bed, took no notice of her daughter who stood nervously a few feet from the bed—as far away as the tiny room would allow. Out of the corner of her eye Nellie watched for Martha, w. nting not to be left alone in the presence of this shrunken person who was no longer her mother, and as she saw Martha move away from the door she moved as well. She had no thought but to escape. No ties at all existed now between her and this strange, remote figure lying motionless in the dim room;

the flabby hand lying on the blanket repelled her. She edged round the door into the other room, keeping her back to the door until the wall cut off the sight.

Martha could not hold back her scorn. "Yoa not going to stay? Dere's some medicine to give, w'at de sister leave w'en she come dis morning—pills to make yoa mama sleep."

Nellie regained her sullenness. "I on'y come to visit. I carn't stay. I come on my day orl."

Martha breathed hard through her flattened nostrils. "Huh! Oright!" She turned away. "Yoa end yoa papa! Lots of good yoa is!"

Nellie answered back more loudly and defiantly. "Dere's no good in my staying. End I carn't help it if Papa isn't here. Maybe he's coming beck today."

"Coming bec! Benjie! Yah, maybe!" Martha turned away in scorn. "End maybe Table Mountain will get up end go for a walk to Steilenbos!"

"Well, I'm not Papa! I come on my day orl." Nellie was becoming more spirited in her defiance. "Mama is oright—she's sleeping. End nobody was arsking yoa to come. . . ."

"Excepting yoa papa, before he run away." Saying this, Martha swung round, as if to smuck the sullen face, then she turned away again in disgust. "Agh, go away! It's a good t'ing orl daughters is not alike!"

Nellie sneered. "Yoa telling me!" She pursed her lips. "Pretty Linda!" She flounced her adolescent jealousy. "Pretty Linda!" All of Nellie's men had always shown too lively an interest in Linda Baart. "Well, anyway, I'm going now." Saying this, she turned and disappeared through the door.

In a low voice Martha sent an imprecation after her—"Little bitch! Yoa . . . puh!" Returning to the sick-room, and seeing Annie apparently asleep, she left the cottage, to go home and prepare the lunch.

But Annie was neither awake nor asleep, neither living nor dead. She was in the dreadful dark passages of the mind known by none but those who wander alone there between living and dying. There, coveting a power which

she had never had when she lived, she dreamed a change upon things. . . .

. . . In life Benjie had spurned her, had been cold and independent, filling his idle life with the company of public bars and with other women. He had never come to her as she waited at the cottage. But now he was rejected by the world, being old and poor—too old to attract women and too poor to buy them. He went about as a hungry dog goes, from the feet of one to the feet of another, head down, eyes up-cast to catch a sign of tolerance. But now there was not even pity. So he returned to Annie. He came hang-dog, wanting her as a solace and a refuge, and when he came Annie laughed in his face and died. . . .

No one could have told the moment when she died, for no one was there. After lunch Martha returned, hoping that Annie might be capable of eating something—possibly a little of Mr Isaac's soup. But Annie made no response to her asking.

Martha was not appalled, for she had been too often with death, and of all people Annie deserved freedom from life. There was nothing to be done, except to lay out Annie's unmourned remains—and all that Martha knew about this was that the feet must be kept together. So she bound Annie's ankles, and then went out to ask Mr Isaac to telephone for Miss Smit again. When that was done Martha went back to Annie's cottage, took the tins of soup, slipped them into her bosom, closed the door gently behind her, and went home.

There Joe was about to take his usual Sunday afternoon nap as Martha entered and stood in front of him with the news.

"Ennie is dead."

Joe looked up with half an eye. "Umm? . . . Oh. . . . Oh, I'm sorry for Ennie." He said it with the proper gravity, then settled back into the chair. "When?"

"I dunno. I think it must hev been w'en I come home to cook de lunch."

Martha pulled the soup from her bosom, and, as she did so, for a moment her conscience troubled her, and she felt

the need to have Joe's support. "Mr Isaac give dis to Ennie dis morning. I was going to heat a tin for her yest w'en I see det she is died. I t'ought p'reps it was oright to bring it, because Ennie don' need it now, end dere isn't anyone else."

Joe heard the doubt in Martha's voice, peered at her shrewdly, then shrugged. "Oh well, it makes no difference to Ennie now. End it's not really Ennie's no more—to hev somet'ing yoa got to be somet'ing. Yoa can't hev anyt'ing if yoa ain't, end Ennie ain't."

They were both silent for a moment, but then, having acquitted themselves, they went on to give proper thought to the consequences of Annie's death. Martha spoke first.

"Dere'hes to be a funeral."

"Yah, end yoa got to pay for a funeral."

"How much?"

"I dunno." Joe was never a man for details. "Ennie ain't got no money, eh?"

"No. End Benjie . . ."

"Benjie got none, for sure. End if he did hev . . ." Joe pulled a wry face. "W'ere is he now?"

"He come beck yesterday, but I don' t'ink he's coming again."

"Anyway, it's no good waiting for him."

"If yoa got no money, Yoe, dey put yoa in a poor men's grave?"

"Yah. . . . Poor Ennie!"

"P'reps Mr Isaac . . .?"

"Det's en idea. Go end see him. He's a good men."

Having given this advice, Joe settled into his chair again, and resumed the contemplation of his stockinged feet. Martha hesitated, but seeing his head nod forward she turned toward the door and walked heavily down the road toward Isaac's store.

At Martha's respectful knock, Isaac came. He was a short, tubby, bald man. His large brown eyes peered out at the bright afternoon. He smiled at her in his kindly, half-absent manner.

"Ah, yes? Something is still wrong again, Mrs Baart?"

"Mr Isaac, we yest been t'inking. . . ."

"About Annie Sapeika?" Isaac shook his head slowly, and his luminous eyes shone with a look of genuine sadness. "It makes me very sad, Mrs Baart."

Martha, being forthright, did not waste time. "We been t'inking about de funeral, Mr Isaac. If yoa got no money, dey put yoa in a poor men's grave, end Ennie got no money."

Isaac looked puzzled for a moment. "Yes. . . . Yes. Poor Annie!"

"End Benjie is not come beck since yesterd-", end if he do come beck, he got no money cider."

While she spoke Isaac was nodding his head, and then, as if he knew what was to come, he smiled faintly.

"Yoe and me cen give p'reps a pound to help, Mr Isaac." Martha paused, and after a second Mr Isaac looked up, and showed his smile more openly.

"All right, Mrs Baart. I'll do it. I'll pay something. I owe Annie some wages—for two, maybe three, weeks."

"I cen go end see de undertakers tomorrow early."

"Isn't that too long to wait? Shouldn't they come before then? Shouldn't they do something soon now?"

"But it's Sunday, Mr Isaac. . . ." Martha stopped short. "Oh I see. Yah, yoa can't stop dying for Sunday."

"The district nurse said when I phoned that she is coming very soon now. Perhaps she will help to arrange it."

"Oh, yah, I'll arsa her. T'enk yoa, Mr Isaac, t'enk yoa." Martha backed out gratefully.

She was just leaving Mr Isaac's gate when Miss Smit arrived, as efficient and understanding as ever. The nurse stood at the gate and watched as Martha approached, and she spoke as Martha reached her.

"Well, poor Annie's gone?"

Martha only nodded.

"And now? Mr Sapeika, and the family?" But then she shook her head ruefully. "No, I know. We must do what we can to help. We must make the arrangements."

"Mr Isaac says he will pay for de funeral—end Yoe and me cen give a pound."

Miss Smit nodded, and smiled slightly. "No, Mrs Baart. No, I'll see Mr Isaac. I'll have it arranged."

Martha hesitated a moment before speaking. "But de Church, sister. I t'ought maybe I should see de minister—where Ennie was going to de church in Clareview. Ennie would like to hev a minister. End I would like to go end ask him."

Before replying, Miss Smit thought a moment, then nodded her agreement.

"All right. And I'll see to everything else, to have the funeral on Tuesday." She looked closely, and even more kindly, at Martha. "You're being very kind, Mrs Baart."

Martha replied unselfconsciously. "End yōu, sister. Yoa been very nice."

The two women stood opposite each other—the nurse experienced and professional in sickness and death, Martha innocently unappalled by it.

Miss Smit turned and entered the cottage, and Martha walked slowly home.

The next morning Martha went to see the parson. The house, situated near the church, was old and rambling, and showed to the world a respectable and self-denying shabbiness. Martha walked timidly up the drive between the shaggy lawns, to the *stoep* which extended round three sides of the house. There was a bell near the door, but Martha, having crossed the *stoep* quietly, as if she had not wanted to be heard, avoided it, and paused before knocking softly on a panel of the door. Having knocked, she stood waiting for some time, but no one came. She hesitated to offend the churchly silence and the dignity of the place by persisting, but after an interval of many seconds she raised her hand to knock again. Then, after another pause, she took courage, and pressed the bell instead. The tinkling seemed to pass down a corridor of many echoes, losing itself in the distance as she waited a while longer. At length, just as she was about to press the bell again in a last appeal, the door opened—but not for her, it seemed.

Two men stood in the entrance in conversation. One—the vicar, by his collar—had one hand on the door-handle

and the other hand lightly on his companion's shoulder. Both were, in their separate ways, distinguished—the cleric by his countenance, which blended the ruggedness of a rugby blue with the loftiness of a well-born saint, and the other by a checked waistcoat and a white carnation in the button-hole of his well-cut coat.

The vicar, tall and ecclesiastical, was talking to his visitor, and he continued to do so for a moment as Martha stood waiting. The two men then shook hands and said good-bye, and the visitor departed. Martha stood aside humbly as he passed her on his way across the *steeple*.

There was a pause, then "Good-morning." This was to Martha. The vicar regarded her down his nose, from his physical and spiritual height.

"Good-morning, marster."

"Can I help you?" He glanced at his watch, then back at her with practised benignity.

"Yes, please, marster. It's about a funeral thet I come."

"Ah yes, well do come in. I'm afraid I have to be getting away, but we can help you, we can help you. I'll take you to my assistant, Mr Forward. Will you sit down? He'll be with you in a moment."

He indicated a chair in the dim hallway, and before she had seated herself he had disappeared down the passage. Martha sat upright, looking straight in front of her, nervous in the dim surroundings. After a few moments the sound of footsteps echoed in the passage, and from the direction in which the busy churchman had gone, another now appeared. He was an ordinary looking young man, of such unsingular appearance that Martha, for whom religion was much a thing of outward signs and proper dignity, was a little doubtful that he would be able to help her. He had the carriage of an athlete, and as he came forward lightly on his toes she saw the rosy bloom of health and youth on his cheeks. But he had set his mouth and eyes with gravity fitting the matter. His smile was sympathetic.

"Good-morning. Your name is . . .?"

"My name is Mrs Baart, marster. I come to ask about a funeral."

"I'm grieved to hear it."

"Oh, *I'm* oright, marster. ^{§1}Yoa don' hev to be sorry for me. I mean it's not in my family. It's a friend. But I *em* sed. She was a nice friend."

The young man shook his head understandingly.

"Will you come this way?"

He turned back along the passage, and Martha followed him. On one wall hung a picture out of which a dim Burne-Jonesian 'whimsy eyed a wild Turner on the opposite wall. It was as if the house was declaring a compromise.

The young man turned in at the door of his study and seated himself at the far side of his desk. He turned and waved her into a chair, then, without wasting time, he began to question her. "Yoa aren't a relative of the deceased?"

"No, marster, yest a friend. Ennie's husband—Ennie is de one who's died—he's gorn somew'ere we don' know. So I come."

"When did your friend lie?"

"Yesterday."

"I see." He appeared to be a little uneasy in this duty to the dead. "You've seen the undertakers? Or someone has?"

"Well, de districk nurse say sife's fixing it, marster. Dey coming today to fix Ennie up."

The young man glanced quickly across at her, then away again. "Yes, well now, I presume the funeral is to be soon. Tomorrow?"

"Yah, dey say it should be tomorrow morning. Yoa mustn' leave dem too long, in case dey . . ."

"I see. Who are the undertakers, do you know, Mrs Baart? I shall ring them and get the details."

"Ventner and Brown, marster."

"Thank you. Now . . . there is a point . . . if I may ask. The family is paying for the funeral?"

"Oh, no, it's Mr Isaac, w'at keeps de store nearby Ennie's house. He's very kind. Ennie was working for him some time, and he told de districk nurse he will pay for de funeral."

"Mr Isaac?" He looked surprised. "He is . . .?"

"He's a Jew, marster."

Mr Forward accepted that with something of a shrug.

"The deceased . . . indeed, I've forgotten to ask her name. . . ."

"Mrs Sapeika, marster."

He wrote it down, along with the address which Martha gave him. "Mrs Sapeika was a member of our parish, I presume."

"Pardon, marster?"

"She used to come to our church?"

"Yes, marster. My family is going to de Met'odist church, but Ennie was coming here every Sunday for a long time, except lately w'en she was not strong. Ennie was orlways saying she likes de windows in de church, end de nice singing up in de front."

Mr Forward was not certain how this should be received, but there was a hint of approval in the shake of his head and in his smile.

"Yes, there is something in that. Yes." He raised his eyes momentarily to the ceiling. "You might come some time, Mrs Baart. We should be glad to welcome you!" Then he rose from behind his desk with a slight, finalising wave. "Then I'll 'phon the undertakers, to find out about the final arrangements. A simple ceremony at the graveside. . . . You are a good friend to do this, Mrs Baart—a good and true friend."

He was glad to be able to arrange it like this, without having to attend at the funeral parlour. For Mr Forward abhorred corpses.

Annie's funeral was on the Tuesday. Nellie saw her duty clearly enough to be present, with lipstick, a blue dress, and a black straw hat. She was properly subdued throughout it all.

Benjie had gone furtively to the cottage the previous afternoon. He had seen the black-coated men and the coffin, and had walked slowly into the small bedroom and seen Annie's body, and had shuddered before turning to

go. On the day of the funeral they saw him standing at a short distance, among the gravestones of the cemetery, with his hat off, looking ragged and forlorn. But he came no nearer; nor did they ever see him at the cottage again.

Chapter 4

MARTIN lay on his back with his hands cupped behind his head, on the broad turf a few feet from the stream that came down from one of the gorges seaming the side of the mountain. His ways were known to the family, and his going so often to Kirstenbosch, strolling alone and aimlessly on the paths, or lying on his back on one of the lawns made warm by the sun, was accepted by them. But lately he had done it more often, through long afternoons.

He had come up about an hour before, sore and disgruntled because he still had no job. He had thrown himself on the grass and stared moodily at the sky. In his vision, blocking out part of the sky, rose the grey-blue bulk of the mountain. For a while he had ignored it; but wilfully, himself half accepting it, it had come and taken over his melancholy; for there is no mood but the mountain towers over it and modifies it. As he stared up at it Martin had only a reproach for it.

... "It's oright for yoa." He turned on his belly to face it. "To yoa it wouldn't metter if the sea came up and covered us, if the green water possessed us, barnacle-covered us, turned our bones to sea-bed sludge, if the importance of things senk into the green nothing. Ennie Sapeika still-dead under a mound under the sea and we drifting-dead with the currents. . . ."

The shadow of a cloud moved from the highest point and fell shapelessly down the high precipice.

... "Why so calm? Why stand as if no time passed. Yoa there, and me lying here, both not moving, both doing nothing. There should be no passing of time—end no trouble that goes with time—when there's nothing but to heng about end wait. But I'm only one in the face of time—end for yoa it don' metter anyway. Who cares?—Not yoa, not yoa end all the mute, still things. For yoa it's easy; nothing changes. The sun winds round yoa, end the

night, end the next sun. Byt what's thet mean to yoa? Nothing. Yoa might be God. Yoa might be God standing over us. End yoa don' care a demn! . . ."

As a cloud brought a cold patch of shadow over him, he pushed his face into the deep, larp turf.

Into his silence, after a long time, a voice broke. "Hallo, Martin."

Martin did not move. He knew the voice, and he was not sure that he wanted to turn and face its owner. But then, irresistibly, a feeling of warmth and friendliness came over him, and after a moment he raised his head and turned over.

"Hallo, Mr Dalvel."

The other's brows rose a little, and Martin, hesitating, corrected the greeting. "Hallo, George."

George Dalvel seemed to acknowledge the second greeting with a slight nod, and his smile broadened. "I hed an idea maybe I'd find you here. I've been to your house twice before, but there was nobody there."

"What did you want?" Martin's voice as he said it had an edge to it, and immediately he had said it he was sorry.

George Dalvel was not good at dissembling. He did not look directly at Martin as he shrugged and answered. "Oh, just paying a visit. See how things were going. It's a few months since you left the school."

"Yes." Martin knew what George wanted to say—'end yoa hev'n't found a job yet—' Sitting with his knees bent and encircled by his arms, he did not look up at George. He struggled between the desire not to talk and the desire to get some of the disappointment and pent-up anger off his mind.

George dropped on to the turf beside him. He was bigger than Martin, and older by a few years. He was neater and more finished, in his speech and his dress. His light brown suit was as good as that of any man riding in the suburban train to work each morning, but his tie was a shade more colourful, and his brown-and-white shoes a little more dapper. His face did not have the signs of poverty and shiftlessness of many Celoureds, nor yet the

carefree, puckish vitality of others. He had a thoughtful countenance, and his smile came slowly.

"It's a lovely day, isn't it? Spring must be pretty well on the way now."

Martin did not answer immediately. He knew that what he was going to say was not what he really believed, for it came partly from his present mood and partly from a desire to argue with his friend, to unload some of the depression from his mind. "It's a lovely day as we find it. But as we use it. . . ." He shrugged expressively.

George looked puzzled. "As we use it?"

"Well, no; not us. No, we have to take it as it comes, take what's dished out to us. I mean as *they* use it—everybody else, who sit in an office and press a button for what they want—those who have the power to use the day as they want." He said it bitterly.

George frowned, and seeing Martin's present mood and knowing something of its cause, he wanted to switch to some harmless subject. Not that there was much good in changing the course one's words took, for beneath the words the thoughts went away in their own direction, so that there were two conversations going on at once—the one of words, and the other of thoughts. But if the words went on loudly and long enough they might shout down the thoughts.

"We're lucky, really. Not many people have this—the mountain—Kirstenbosch." He tried to change to a lighter tone, as he waved his arm to take in their surroundings. "The old mountain is always there. I suppose it affects us after a time. Becomes part of us, in a way."

"Part of us? I suppose so. But that's no help."

"No? I don't know so much."

"I do. Ask . . . ask Papa—Joc—what does he get out of it. Go and stand in Main Road and ask anyone who passes if they notice it."

"You come here quite often. You like it."

"That's different. I come because I got nothing else to do."

"End because you like coming?"

Martin did not answer, and neither of them spoke for a

moment, until George remembered the object of his coming.

"I went to your house before coming here, Martin. I wanted to see you particularly. . . . There was a possibility of a job. Et Somerset West." As he said it, George saw Martin's first look of expectation, then of disappointment, and he continued quickly: "I know it's not ideal to have to go out there. But it's only about thirty miles. That's not far. There's a printer—he has a small business—who's looking for a good Coloured boy, about your age. It would be quite interesting, Martin—better than almost any job you would get in Cape Town these days. You might like to think about it." George paused before continuing more earnestly: "It's a chance, Martin. These days jobs are easy only if you want to wheel a barrow, and use a hammer, or if you got money to spare."

Martin's eyes flashed angrily, then he slouched back on to his elbow and frowned. And George could find no effective answer to his young friend's disillusionment. Once again he felt their talk becoming desultory and their meeting becoming futile. "You hev'n't been along to collect any books lately. Read anything interesting?"

"No, not really. It's difficult."

"It always is. I don't get much time myself." As he saw Martin's lip curl into a response he went on hurriedly: "You must come along. Or better 'till, I'll bring some to your house. Perhaps tomorrow? I've got on by a fellow called Abrahams, and a book of pictures by Wenning."

Martin appeared to soften. "Thenk yo, George. I'd be gled to borrow them."

"Right. Tomorrow I'll try'r to get along and see you."

George rose to leave, relieved that he had at any rate made it possible for himself to keep in touch with Martin. "How's your family? Keeping well?" Almost imperceptibly he hesitated. "Your sister?"

"Everyone's all right. Linda—we don't see her so much these days again." He nodded in the direction of the houses settled in their well-kept grounds on the slope across the valley, and grinned despite his mood. "Big stuff

this time. Half a dozen lev⁴tories, end yoa lose your way 'round, as far as I can make out."

George stood for a second, as if to begin again and try to revive the meeting that had fizzled out. But it was no good.

He said 'good-bye, and moved off toward the small bridge across the stream, and then toward the road that led down to the main gates of Kirstenbosch Gardens.

The water in the stream was darkening, drawing the dusk from the sky, and after a while Martin himself rose and walked slowly through the gardens, making for the same gates. He came out on to the road that would lead down through the oaks toward the cottages, but he had not gone far when Johnnie Peterson came out of the trees, accompanied by his friend, Skaap Vorster. Johnnie grinned as he saw Martin; Skaap drifted in behind him, like an escort vessel.

"Got, if it isn't Baart, de men wid a load on his mind! Yoa looking busy, Baart. Yoa mustn't t'ink too much, men—on'y w'en it's wort' it."

It was impossible to turn away and evade them, so Martin returned the greeting without enthusiasm.

Johnnie was not put off. "Mustn't look so bleddy sorry for yoaself, men. Life is short. Yoa should know—de books say so. . . ."

Martin could not help smiling, but he moved out into the road, to show that it was his intention not to be delayed. Johnnie shook his head and raised his eyebrows mockingly.

"Baart, yoa's like de busiest men in Cape Town. Yoa orlways got to be going somewhere. Yoa never got no time to come end hev a good time."

Martin wondered again at Johnnie's attitude toward himself. It always showed a friendliness under its gloss of mischief, and was never unpleasant.

"No yob yet? Yoa want to be yoa own boss, men, like us." Johnnie nodded toward his scruffy companion, who grinned in return. "Peterson end Vorster, Ltd. We in de big business."

Before Martin could decide whether or not he should

tell them about the offer that George Dalvel had made, it had slipped out. It was something, at any rate, with which to silence Johnnie for the moment, and despite his disinclination he said with some satisfaction, "We-ell, I hed a real offer of a job today." Then he wished he had not said it, and turned quickly across the road to avoid talking of it.

But Johnnie showed no particular interest in the news. He merely shook his head sadly and said, "On *got*! Pity!", and then shouted good-naturedly down the road after Martin, "'*Tot sieps, kerel!* Sêr yoa some more, eh!"

Chapter 5

As Linda came down through the lower avenues from Wintering her progress was like a bird's: she ran a few paces under a sudden impulse of urgency, and then she checked herself and seemed to drag her feet after some lingering image behind the brightness of her eyes. And so she came down toward the cottage, darting and lingering, showing in her movements the changing of her mind between some eagerness and the savouring of some keen pleasure. From the river up to the cottage she almost ran, but as she approached she slowed down. It was there, by the first cottages, that Dora Fortune intercepted her.

"Harro Linda. I'm not seeing yoa for a long time. Ever since yoa gorn to work et Mountain View."

When she first heard the voice from the corner of one of the houses, Linda felt a sudden impatience. She wanted to get home with her news. But Dora had run to the road, and in the face of her friendliness Linda could not run away.

Dora worked at the cigarette factory but, having nothing ill in her nature, she was not one of the girls on whose account Linda had left. Dora was not sufficiently sensible of the attractions of others to be jealous; she was not sufficiently sensible of the lack of them in herself to be dismayed. She was slow-minded, guileless, and a good friend.

Linda responded to her broad smile.

"Hallo, Dora. The time's gone quickly."

"I been missing yoa et de factory, Linda." Dora's large, wide-open eyes showed her genuine feeling. "Yoa liking yoa yob?"

"Yes."

"It's a big house, isn't it? I remember I seen it once going for a walk up along Riebeeck Evenue one Sunday arfternoon. Yoa remember? De day w'en Pete Krogmás

go end steal some grapes from down by Alban farm, end we was orl togedder one arfternoon. It was a nice day, det. Well, I seen de house den. It's nice. Is de medem nice?"

It was curious how Dora could touch within a second what was already filling Linda's mind. Linda answered with a sudden instinctive guardedness.

"Yes, thenk yo'a, Dora. She's very nice. It's altogether nice."

"End de marster?"

Linda liked Dora more than any of the other girls, but she wished now that there were not so many questions. She answered this last one non-committally. "He's all right."

"Sometime de peoples in de big houses is not so nice. Dey got funny ideas, end everyt'ing hes to be yest so."

"Oh, Mr and Mrs Saunty are all right."

They walked on together. Dora lived in a cottage in a narrow lane that turned down along the stream, and as they came to the entrance of the lane Dora stopped. "We going up de mountain some week-end soon, Linda. Some of us—me, end Jannie Hartnel, end Fortuna, end Piet, end Nellie, end some more. We going to stay over de night, end coming beck Sunday arfternoon. Yoa coming?"

Linda hesitated. "Well . . . thenk yoa, Dora . . . but I don' know. Some week-ends I hev to work. I take turns with Amy et week-ends. End . . ." No, there was no need to tell Dora any more. . . . "Sorry I can't tell yoa if I cen go or not, Dora, because I really don' know."

Dora grinned ingenuously. "Yah, well it don' metter now, Linda. P'reps yoa will know by de timç we find out w'en we going. . . . It's nice wedder now, eh? Looks like summer's here." Dora hesitated before adding a little shyly, "How is Martin, Linda? Not got a yob yet?"

"No, not yet, Dora."

"I hope so soon."

"Yes, I hope so too."

Dora glanced sideways, wishing to ask some more, but being slow and shy, she could think of nothing. So she turned down the lane and called back over her shoulder, "Goo'bye, Linda! I hope yoa cen come up de mountain!"

"So long, Dora!" Linda turned and continued alone

toward the cottage. The meeting had dispirited her by bringing her back to the habitual circle of her life, to the relationships which she could not and should not avoid. She wished to be able to cut herself away from them, to live the new life of Wintering, but yet with some self-pity she still wanted the only companionship and friendship that she had ever known.

When she entered the cottage Martha greeted her. "Not working tonight, Linda?"

"No, Mama. Mr and Mrs Saunty are going out to some friends, so they said I could go off."

"Det's good. I t'ink yoa lucky to be working in sech a nice place."

Linda followed her mother into the back room, where the meal was being prepared for Joe's return.

"Marster Saunty end de medem go out a lot, Linda? Dey got lots of friends?"

"I think they know lots of people. They go out a lot, end people are always coming to the house, visiting."

"Dey seem to be very nice people, de Sauntys."

"Yes."

"W'at's de marster doing? He's working in Cape Town, in an orfice?"

Linda was glad that Martha asked these questions, for they held Wintering and the Sauntys in the conversation, and would make it easier for her to give her own news. For now that she was with Martha the impulse had died, and she was a little shy.

"I don' know really, Mama. Some days he doesn't go into town like es if he was heving to work every day, end he seems to come home when he likes."

"Maybe he's de boss of a big company. I know once a long time ago w'en I was working wid some people et Newlands, de marster is a dyrector of a place, end he seem to be working on'y harf de time. I know, yoa get some people like det."

"I think . . . perhaps Mr Saunty is jest very rich. . . ."

"Yoa t'ink so, eh? Ah, *got*, it mus' be very nice! Be rich, end do no work! It would be no good for Yoe. He's wasting too much time es it is, going fishing, end not

worrying about w'at he should be worrying about. He's a *skellum*, Yoe! Ya . . . ah, but to hev a lot of money. . . . But for peoples like us. . . ." Martha shook her head and grinned down at the stove.

The subject of Mr Saunty was slipping away, and Linda wanted to hold it. "He paints a bit . . ."

"Yoe? Orl he's painting is levct'ries on railway stations."

"No, I mean Mr Saunty."

"Oh? Oh, det's nice. You mean painting pictures? Yea seen any pictures he's painted?"

" . . . end he draws."

"Oh, yah? Maybe he's rich because he's en artist."

"Mama . . . Mr Saunty hes drawn a picture of me." It was what Linda had been waiting to tell, and her voice had a note of pride in it.

Martha's fork remained poised over the potatoes as she turned, her eyebrows raised in question. "A picture of yoa?" . . . Her face wrinkled slowly, a doubt coming over her mind. "Linda . . . He don' draw yoa wid no clothes on?"

Linda in her turn halted in laying the table, and she flushed. "Mama! Of course not!" Her flush came not only from her indignation but also from a quick guilt in her touched imagination.

Martha shrugged and resumed her stirring. "Well . . . yoa see desc pictures w'at's drawn in de megazines. Like de one on de celender over by dere"—she nodded to the door—"de one Yoe bring home once."

"But he doesn't draw to sell them. He doesn't draw like thet. End he only drew my fact."

"Oh well, det's oright. Is it a good picture? Will de marster give it for yoa to keep?"

"Well . . . he says it's only rough. End . . . I suppose it *does* look like me." There was a note of doubt in Linda's voice, but she hastened to cover it. "It's really a very nice one."

Martha stood with her back to the stove. It was a moment before she spoke.

"Linda . . . yoa don' want to get no big ideas. It

wouldn' be no good if yoa do. . . . From working in a big house, end seeing lots of nice t'ings end people w'at is rich. I don' want to be a busybody, but det's w'at my mama is telling me w'en I was going to sech a place. Dey different people from us, Linda.

"Once Ennie Sapeika was saying p'reps yoa got big ideas for yoaself. Once she was saying yoa got too big ideas to go to bi'scope wid Nellie. I know Ennie is yealous, because Nellie is not pretty end is a *pampoen*, and Piet Krogmas don' take so much notice of her es he do of yoa. But, orl de same, Linda, yoa got to be careful. Ead being drawed yoa picture. . . ."

Martha shook her head doubtfully. She spoke it forthrightly and naturally, without the heat required to support poor authority, or the elaboration to cover embarrassment. And Linda accepted, as naturally, her mother's right to talk like that; and with the same forthrightness she answered:

"Yes, Mama. But Ennie is . . . was wrong. I don' want to be without friends. It's not me, Mama; it's Nellie mostly. I don' like her, end she don' like me. She's the one what tells the other girls I hev big ideas, end . . . it looks like they want to be on her side. They go with her." Her eyes flashed for a moment. "End she is jealous! End es for Piet . . ." She shrugged.

"Yah, I know. Piet Krogmas is no yentlemen—rendy es a dog. I don' like him so much."

There followed a short silence, as Martha stirred the pot and Linda completed the laying of the table, until Linda herself spoke again.

"Mr Saunty is going to *pau* my picture now."

Martha's glance was shrewd, and the creases about her eyes deepened.

"From the drawing he made. I saw it when I was cleaning, end today he asked if p'rcaps at the week-end I cen come end sit for a little while for him to finish it."

"Maybe sometime he cen let yoa bring it to show us, eh?"

The front door opened just then, and Joe came through the front room to the kitchen.

"Harro, Linda. Yoa got time orf?"

"Yes, Papa, jest for this evening."

"How's t'ings?"

Martha interposed, and although she chuckled, there was still pride in her voice. "Demarster, Mr Saunty, been painting her picture."

"Cho-o! He's a painter, eh!" Joe beamed as he lowered himself into his usual chair. "But not like me, eh! Yoa know, sometimes w'en I got a brush in my hend I'm t'inkin' maybe I should be a painter like dem w'at paints ladies wid no clothes on." He sighed, and shook his head, and seemed to ogle some vision. Then a look of speculation came plainly to 'nis face. There was more interest in the expression than reproof. "He-ey! Painting yoa, eh! He's not painting yoa wid no clothes on, Linda?"

This time Linda took it with resignation. She looked across at Martha, and when she saw her mother's grin there was no longer any offence. Good humour broke through, and she sighed. "Nó, Papa. He only drew a picture of my face."

"Oh." The tone may have been one of slight disappointment. It was the idea that appealed to him. Joe drew his chair nearer the table, and rolled up his sleeves. "Yoa know, it's a funny t'ing. I was yest saying today to Bosman—he's de barstard w'at I work for; he's a real solemn barstard, he's hardly ever larfing; his wife is going orf wid a chep from Yo'burg, end he don' know w'at to do wid his kids w'at is still going to school, so now he's a lot bleddy solemn den he orlways was—yah, well I was saying to him today, 'W'y don' we paint de levatories yellow, men? Good bright yellow', so's to make people see dem easy—no mistakes, end no hunting about in a hurry. Me-en,' I say, 'it's a bleddy good idea, end it looks nice!' End for a change he's saying, 'Yah, it's quite en idea, but maybe in enudder colour, w'at people is more used to—maybe red.' But no!" Joe flung his hands up in disgust. "We carn't! We got to paint dem grey . . . like a bleddy t'understorm!"

"But w'en I'm coming home yest now, I t'ink of enudder good idea. It's a better one. Instead of yellow, we paint

some w'ite—nice end shiny—end some bleck, or maybe brown. Den we don' need to paint any signs, on'y 'Ladies' end 'Yentlemen' end 'Dames' end 'Here'. End de Europeans don' hev to look hard for de ones for dem, end we don' hev to look hard for de ones for us. It's orl easy! It's a good idea, yah, Mart'a? On'y I'm not saying anyting to Bosman. Maybe he won' unnerstend if I'm telling a yoke or not. He's a funny chep, Bosman; he hardly ever smile. But it's a good idea, eh?"

Joe beamed, and acknowledged with a nod the plate that Martha put before him. Martha shook her head tolerantly, but when her back was turned on him she grinned.

"O-oh, yah! Very clever, Yoc Baart! Yoa been heving a drink wid anyone arfter yoa finished work, by any charnce?"

Joe looked up and waved his fork. "Well, es a metter of fact I seen . . ."

"Yah, I know."

Joe shfugged, and resumed his eating, and Martha and Linda sat down. To Linda, Joe had always been a rather remote person, living near the fringe of her own life. Martha was the only strong link; Joe was like a lodger who had always been in the house, a little coarse but always jovial. She had always laughed at his coarseness, and had never been ashamed.

With the thrice of them together, Linda asked where Martin was.

"He's gorn to see d' t teacher w'at was et his school, de nice one who help him get de scholarship to stay et school—Mr Darlvel. De udder day not so long ago he was meeting Mr Darlvel et Krstenbos'. Mr Darlvel was saying p'reps dere was a charnce of a yob for Martin, end Martin on'y tell me about it today. I don' t'ink he's got much hope det dere is a yob really. . . ." Her expression clouded. "Martin seem to lose his spirit a bit dese days. I tell him, if Mr Darlvel says so, den he mustn' be so pessimistic, but . . . He don' seem to like de idea, anyway."

Martha rose to take Joe's plate, while Joe frowned.

"W'y don' he like it? W'at's de metter wid anv vob dese days—except det yoa got to work et orl!"

"He says it's et Somerset Wes'."

"Well, w'at's de metter wid Somerset Wes'?"

Martha looked over her shoulder at Joe's brown pate, sadly for a moment. "It's a long way."

"Agh, nonsense! T'irty mi's or so. It's not so far. W'at's de yob he been offered?"

"He says it's in a printer's. Dere's a men w'at wants a Coloured boy like Martin."

"Well, den, I don' see no objection."

Between Joe and this family of his there was not a close community of minds, and each of the joys and the troubles of the others did not find its reflection in him. Martha was his wife, with whom he had lived many years and with whom he was as familiar as if she were a well-worn coat against the winter. Martin and Linda were his children, and Francis the child adopted by him—or rather by Martha—and they shared his house and his food. As if on a train, they travelled together: they, the others, in a compartment, and he in the corridor talking with his friends. To him it was not distressing that Martin should have to go away, nor would Martha's feeling be understandable.

"He's gorn to see dis Mr Darvel to make sure?"

"I don' know. He didn' really say. He yest said he was going to get some books to read. Mr Darvel told him to go along w'enever he want to borrow some."

"Books! Agh, books! . . ." But vehemence was not a part of Joe, and he threw up his hands in resignation. "I suppose dey oright for some people, but I don' see w'at it is. I don' see w'at good it is to Martin; he walks about wid a load on his mind like en old men. Maybe it was a bed t'ing for him to stay et de school so long. It don' get him now'ere. It don' help him to get a yob. Look how long he been widout one since he left de school. Oh, I don' know. . . ." It was beyond Joe, and he was prepared to leave it at that.

But Martha was in defence. "But he's a clever boy, Yoe. It's not his fault." It was in her instinct to defend, though the subject was not a happy one.

"Whose fault, den? If he wants a yob so much, w'y don' he go end find one wid a carpenter, or a painter, same es

mc. Dere's plenty to do if yoa really want to do somet'ing. Det's de way I see it—plenty of work, but yoa carn't be fussy."

Martha had no answer. She could articulate none of the sympathy she felt, a sympathy which went in the blood to the ends of her body and warmed in her heart, but found no expression on her tongue. For Martha's experience of life corresponded with Joe's opinion. And sometimes its persuasion seemed so strong that she did not know if experience or her heart were right. Her reason, born out of her life of menial work done without question, said that Joe was right. Never had there been a doubt, of her own place and that of her people, of her own work and that of her husband— from her youth and through the colourless years until her son had grown and brought another nature before her eyes. Their nature was to labour with their hands, to keep their eyes down and not to waste time lifting them to envy the clouds. It was to live in the walls of a small place, to go in the morning and return in the evening, to bear Joe in his drunkennesses and to satisfy him in his passions, to comfort Annie Sapeika when she lived and bury her when she was dead. With each day's end its own horizon, expectation was superfluous; human grace was an extravagance; love was—nothing but coition passioned by unlovely lovers. Reflection was for those who had the mind for it. Martha accepted these conditions, with no idea of disputing them.

Martin cut across this simple acceptance that was like a faith, by being what he was: a thoughtful boy who enjoyed the company of books and who was, by the ordinary standards, singular. He had stayed at the school longer, with a scholarship; but without the help of these outward signs she knew his nature well enough. Joe had accepted Martin's scholarship with a shrug, for it cost him nothing; Martha had wondered at it and had been proud. And now, whereas Joe saw the end of Martin's extra schooling as an interlude ended, Martha knew there had been a departure, that by some grace Martin had to live out his strange, intemperate ways. There was no trying to understand him. There was no trying to argue with him. It was

right to let him go his way. But this was not well enough formulated in her mind for her to explain to Joe, so she was silent. She turned away from it and began to talk of other things.

"Linda, I seen Piet Krogmas 'yestiday. He come up to me w'en I'm going down town, end arsk w'y he don' see yoa so much dese days. He's *vragtie* like a filum star yoa see in a bi'scope—so *he* reckon! He got his hair growing down his cheek parst his ears. He was saying det him end some of de udders was going up de mountin some time—I t'ink he 'was saying next week-end. He was wanting to know if yoa was going. I tell him I don' know yoa business."

"Yes, I know, mama. I seen Dora tonight when I was coming home. She says also that they were going up the mountain, end will I go too. But I don' know if I'm working in the week-end. It depends on Amy—if she's going off on Sunday."

"Well, anyway, I told Piet it's up to yoa. I don' know. But I told him maybe yoa don' want to go. He keeps saying w'y don' he see yoa more, like w'en yoa was et de factory. So I says, 'W'y arsk me'."

"It's not easy now. I don' get off every day, or hev time to go about the same es they do et the factory."

"Yah, end I keep telling I'm. End w'en I tell him maybe yoa p'reps working in de week-end, end yoa carn't go, he's yest smiling like a snake, end larfing. He says, 'Oh, well, Nellie Sapeika is going enyway'."

Martha glanced at her daughter. She did not approve of such virility as Piet Krogmas showed, but she wished that Linda would be more predictable in her relations with the other young people, and readier to keep Nellie Sapeika in her place. To understand Martin was one thing for Martha; to understand Linda, who was more remote from her, was another.

"Nellie cen go if she likes. It's not my business." Linda rose to collect the dishes. Just as when she had left Dora earlier in the evening, she was again depressed with a feeling of anger and loneliness and self-commiseration. In all her purpose of edging herself out and away from the community of her own people, she refused to acknowledge

that she might fail, that it was not possible to peninsulate herself from them. But this loneliness was part of the price of trying. It was a jealous inheritance.

They finished the meal, and Joe sat back in his chair by the table as Martha and Linda cleared up. They put a plate in the oven for Martin. It was dark now, following the long twilight that hangs over that shadowed side of the mountain when the sun is shut off early in the day. Joe sat back in his chair half dozing in the lamplight. The two women cleared the table, washed up, straightened the room, then sat back with the intention of composing themselves to sew. Whenever Linda came home for an evening, and it was too late to do anything else, she fell back into the habitual ways of the household.

But this was not the usual pattern of an evening in the cottage—for Joe to be with the others sitting docile and domestic in the light of the lamp. It was an unnatural pause, with Martha and Linda waiting, unable to settle themselves until Joe should play out his part. And in a short while he shook himself like a dog, blinked, and rose suddenly.

"Going out for a walk. It's a nice night. Not going to be so long." He walked out through the front room into the night.

Both Linda and Martha glanced up at his back, then at each other. Martha grinned as she spoke.

"Yah, I suppose it's down to Charlie Souter's house tonight. Maria Souter gorn orf to stay wid her sister at Ottery, end, till she come beck Charlie is heving a good time so long. . . . Agh, well, yoa carn't stop it. De larst time Yoe is winning six bob et playing cards."

Francis came in, and having been given supper, was put to bed. The kitchen, ill-lit and full of shadows, and the whole cottage in its darkness, settled into the silence of all humble places. Martha was placid, for she had come to the age of resignation, where is the loneliness of the wife grown stale and passionless, and the mother grown out of the relying youth of her children. Linda sat waiting, for nothing she knew, but with the youth in which everything is expectation.

Chapter 6

MARTIN and George had talked again about the job at Somerset West, just long enough for George to press it on to Martin and for the latter to give in. And then, because to neither of them was it a congenial subject, they had passed on to books and other people's minds. And it was late when Martin rose to go. He made the move reluctantly—but they could not sit—he and George Dalvel—all night in this room that had always given Martin a mental shelter and comfort, talking of congenial things, being shut off from the darkness in which everything and everyone were impatiently moving and doing. It was time to go into the streets where those who loitered were edged and eyed aside, where in the dark the people who strode purposefully cast distrusting looks and hurried on, where those who touched your sleeve and whispered wanted you only as a stranger to their anonymity and cackled after you and taunted you for a lily when you brushed them off.

"Well, it's late. I'll hev to get going. Thanks for those books, George."

"No, Martin, sit down a bit. There's plenty of time."

Martin shook his head. "Thanks, George, but I really better go."

"Well, all right, but let me drive you home."

"Don't worry. I'll walk."

"No, nonsense. It's a long way from Clareview station to your house. Come on. It's a pleasant evening, and I'd like a run in the car."

George lived near the school, down in the neighbourhood where the line between the people of different colours became blurred and indistinct and no one was the less happy for it. They drove from there up across the railway, and across the brightly-lit gash of Main Road, up through the quieter houses of the better suburbs, and then down across the bridge to the dark cottages among the trees.

Martha and Linda barely heard the noise of the car stopping on the gravel fringe of the road.

"Come inside, George. Mama will be home. Yoa never really met her."

"Thenks, Martin, but I don't think I ought to stay."

"Come on. It's my turn to say 'Nonsense'."

Hearing the noise of the doors slamming, Martha rose to get Martin's supper from the oven. She paused when she heard the extra footsteps and Martin's voice talking to someone. Martin himself came through the outer room, leading the way through to the light. He stood in the opening to let George pass.

"Mama . . . Oh harro, Linda. I didn't know yoa were at home." Martin was more diffident now, conscious of the meanness of the room in the dim light of the oil lamp. "Mama, yoa hev'n't met Mr Dalvel properly before. Nor yoa, Linda. Mr Dalvel was kind enough to give me a lift home."

Martha smiled in her vast, friendly way. "I'm glad to meet yoa, Mr Darvel. We seen yoa before, but we never really meet yoa. It's nice of yoa to bring Martin home det long way."

George returned her friendliness in his nod and mumbled greeting. When he smiled with the same friendliness at Linda she nodded briefly, smiled with some shyness, and let her eyes revert to her sewing. There was an awkward moment, which Martin filled uneasily.

"George has loaned me some books."

It was Martha who, ignoring Martin's pale remark, redeemed the moment. "P'reps Mr Darvel would like some cawffee? It's nice if ye cen stay and hev some, Mr Darvel. We got some or'most ready, arfter supper."

George was pleased by the offer, but he demurred, as he thought he should. Martha beamed as if she had not heard him, and turned to the stove. Martin would wait for his supper.

"Take a lemp end go to de udder room, Martin. De cawffee won't take long to be ready. P'reps yoa cen get some music so long on de wireless."

This was the virtue of the small front room: to be swept

and dusted, polished and preserved, for visitors to sit in. The veneer sideboard had stood there for many years, bearing its load of photographs, vases, glass gew-gaws, and sea-shells. The heavy old chairs, lace betasselled, and made for a larger space, crowded together to overwhelm a small central table where an empty vase dripped glass pendants like icicles. And a radio glowered over everything from a table in the corner, having been brought—grudging, it seemed—to such company, and surrendering itself only by instalments over three years.

“I’m sorry, but we can’t hev any music in any case, George. It’s worked, on batteries, and they gone flat.” Martin nodded at the radio, and motioned George into one of the chairs. As they sat, and were waiting for Martha and Linda to bring in the coffee, Martin lowered his voice and leaned across to George. “Perheps . . . George . . . yoa could mention to Mama about the job. I think perhaps if yoa tell her, it might be better. Will yoa tell her? . . .”

George’s features expressed his doubt, but he withheld from voicing it. He knew Martin’s reason for asking this. Since, earlier in the evening, he had told Martin that there definitely was a job, and that the printer at Somerset West would take him as soon as he could go, he had sensed his friend’s reserve, and had known that the boy had no heart for the plan. After he had tried earnestly for some time to persuade Martin that this was a good opportunity, the boy had shrugged, had admitted it, and had promised to accept the job. But there would be no conviction in Martin’s demeanour if he should be left to tell Martha by himself, and, not being happy about the promise itself, he flinched from telling of it.

When Martha and Linda had come in, bringing the coffee, and they had all taken a seat, so that the room was completely filled, there was not one of them who did not feel some embarrassment. Martha least of them, for to her conversation was not such a necessary part of companionship that she missed it greatly. Any disturbance she felt was the slight one of having in her house a man different in ways from those among whom she habitually lived; but

her discomfiture was slight because in the end she unwittingly took all men to be of a common humanity; the differences were not essential. Martin, for his part, was waiting uneasily for George to tell about the job. And besides, with a loathing for himself, he felt a little ashamed of Martha and the cottage. He would have liked to leave them, and return there later when George had gone. Linda's uneasiness was because of George, and his because of her; for they were each too aware of the other, and each behaved as if the other were not there.

George collected himself, to tell what Martin had asked him to tell. "Mrs Baart, Martin has told you about the job at Somerset West?"

"Yes, Mr Darvel. It's kind of yoa to trouble." She glanced at Martin as she said it.

"It's a friend of mine who told me about it, a teacher at Somerset West." He hesitated. "It will be a good thing, I think. A good opening, and good training. They would like him to start as soon as he can get there—Monday, if possible."

"Monday? It's not much time, Mr Darvel."

"No, I know. It means a bit of a rush, I'm afraid."

Martha shrugged. "We lucky to get it. It's a good thing for Martin." There was no great confidence in her voice. "I don't suppose it will take yoa long to fix up ready to go, Martin?" . . .

George interrupted as she paused.

". . . Oh, I forgot, Mrs Baart. This friend of mine says he can give Martin a place to stay. And also, I can take Martin out to Somerset West, perhaps on Sunday?"

"Oh, yah, I forgot about a place to stay. . . . Well, I'm glad. Things will be alright then. I don't take long to fix these things, eh? Hev some more cawffee, Mr Darvel?" Smacking her thigh lightly, she resumed her usual good nature, as if to dismiss any doubts, and they switched to talking a while of other things, though haltingly.

Eventually Linda rose. "Mama, will yoa excuse me please? It's getting late, and I better go now."

"So soon, Linda?"

"Yes, Mama; I'm sorry. I wanted to get to bed quite

n-ry. Friday is orlways a busy day." She moved toward
he kitchen, avoiding to look at George Dalvel and her
earrier.

the herge and Martin rose with her. George, too, made his
broth-ies. "I think I better be going also, Mrs Baart. I

Geor really mean to stay so long, but it was an oppor-
apolog to tell you about Somerset West. Thank you for the
didn't. I've enjoyed meeting you . . . end Miss Baart." He
tunity)led. "Perheps she would . . . I could give her a lift to
coffee lace . . .?"

hesit Linda heard it in the kitchen. She stood holding her
her ath as she waited for Martha to reply.

La Yoa not going to stay a little while, Mr Darlvel? Yoa
breen' need to hurry away."

Linda shook her head and grimaced to herself in her
dc suspense.

George laughed softly. "I really must go, Mrs Baart.
When you're a teacher there's always something to
do."

"It's a long way out of your direction, Mr Darlvel. . . ."

Linda sighed to herself in the kitchen.

"Oh, it's not far really. Riebeeck Avenue, I think
Martin said. And it must be quite a long walk at this
time of the night. It wouldn't take me a few minutes in the
car."

The walk was in itself long enough, and the night late
enough, to dispose Linda kindly to the offer of a lift; but
there was a keener pleasure in hearing George Dalvel
make it. She stood longing for her mother to end the
courtesies.

"It's very nice of yoa, Mr Darlvel. I'm sure Linda would
be very gled. . . . Linda! Mr Darlvel is saying he will
give yoa a lift to Riebeeck Evenue!"

Linda came to the doorway, smiled prettily, and
murmured her thanks.

"Yoa better get ready quick, Linda. Mustn't keep Mr
Darlvel waiting. Yoa cen leave de t'ings in de kitchen."
Martha turned back to George and launched into fresh
thanks. "It's very kind of yoa to do orl dis—first bringing
Martin, den taking Linda." She chuckled in her open, un-

embarrassed manner. "We never been so posh es dis, riding in a car, orl in one night." Martin flinched inwardly at his mother's ingenuousness.

Linda stood waiting and ready, and George stood aside for her to lead the way out. Martha came to the gate, but Martin remained indoors, for now that the decision was made for him to go to Somerset West—and to leave so soon—he was left with a curious dispiritedness, dull and unlively, waiting to shrink back into himself.

George turned the car in the road, and as he and Linda drove away through the trees, Martha stood for a moment, watching the light go down through the darkness. As she came back into the house there might have been a soft gleam of speculation in her eyes.

Where the road turned up from the river the headlights passed across two figures walking on the verge. They were Piet Krogmas and someone else whom Linda did not recognise. She smiled to herself in the dark, with some self-satisfaction, wondering what Piet would think if he could see her now. He would never in all his life have a car. For a second he—and all the others she knew—seemed colourless, and all their ways seemed unattractive. It seemed to her for a moment that she had left it all behind her, that she was looking back through an open door at old episodes.

George was struggling to find some subject to fill the silence. He found it in his own preoccupation, in the desire for assurance against his own doubts.

"I wonder if it's the right thing—about Martin, I mean. Miss Baart, you think that Martin is really keen to go to Somerset West?"

Linda did not know what she should say. She had not thought about it, for her brother was not close to her. And the question, asked suddenly, brought a stumbling reply from her. "I . . . I don't really know. 'I . . . it's hard to know what Martin likes, hard to understand. . . ."

"I thought . . . you see him a lot, end . . ." George broke off and started again: "Martin hes never been away from home before, hes he?"

"No."

"He's very fond of your mother. End she thinks a lot of him, too."

This Linda understood better. All her life, from when she could remember, she had been aware of the closer love between her mother and Martin. In the beginning she had resented it, but in the years the resentment had died. As their closer sympathy and love had become more acceptable to her, through a toleration of established things, she herself had become more self-reliant and independent.

"You mean, he doesn't want to leave end go and live somew'ere else?"

"Yes, that's it."

"But he's quite old now, Mr Dalvel."

"Yes, I know." He had brought the car to a slower speed, to give time, and he did not continue immediately.

"But that doesn't help him. You know your brother better then I do, Miss Baart. He's a strange chap. He thinks about things more then we do—sort of broods over them. It's not the same for him as it would be for us." Suddenly a note of feeling came into his voice which surprised Linda. "Oh, it's all wrong!"

When Linda did not answer—for she could think of nothing to say—he went on; "It's not him; it's the rest of it that's wrong. He shouldn't be left in the air like this." There was another silence, in which Linda was uncomfortable. "Perhaps it would hev been better really if Martin hedn't gone on at the school."

Linda's failure to understand was apparent in her response. "But he was very gled, end so was Mama. She was very proud for him to get a scholarship."

"Yes, but I mean in the long run. Even now. What heppens now? He should really go to the University. It would finish the thing off . . . or, anyway, it would give him a chance. Then he could become a teacher. . . . Now he's like a . . . like a statue that's only half-made. You hev a half-finished thing, but also—if you know Martin end look close at him—you hev the promise of how it could turn out if only someone would help to finish it."

He glanced at her for guidance as the car came to a

cross-road high up in the avenues, and she signalled for him to turn to the right.

"Martin is the wrong kind of fellow to be left like that. That's what I'm afraid of, Miss Baart. Martin doesn't think with his head. He feels. He needs someone—and he needs a long time—to show him how to control his feeling. Half-finished like this he could be hurt by the clever ideas of any fool. He can get hold of wrong ideas, and brood on them, and not be able to sort them out."

George glanced at Linda's profile again, and he realised suddenly that she did not understand. And just as suddenly he lost his own anxious zest, and dropped his voice. "I'm sorry; it's difficult to explain it, really."

Linda, being aware of his change, longed to make amends. There had been some power in his anxiety which had fascinated her. "No, really, Mr Dalvel. I think I do understand. But I never known Martin very well. I think only Mama knows him well." She broke off and pointed to the gates they were passing just then. "Oh, this is the place; I forgot."

He drew up suddenly, sorry that it was over. When he had stopped, and she had stepped out into the road and was standing by its side waiting for him to move off, he longed to stay and prolong it. But Linda was speaking through the open window.

"Thank you, Mr Dalvel. It was very kind of you. Good-night."

He hesitated, then returned her "Good-night", and turned the car slowly round. When he glanced back she was turning to enter the gates.

George felt irritated at himself. He had not said any of the things he had wished to say. For one thing, he had meant to say that he had once met Mr Nicholas Saunty; that would have been a step. And he had wanted to ask her if he might see her again. He felt—and then reproached himself for feeling it—that he had a right to see her more; he was her brother's friend. But it was useless, for she was gone, and he had spent his time boring her with his own preoccupations. Martin was a stranger to her—that he should have known. There had been only a

polite "good-night", and now the whole thing would have to be started again. George's irritation did not diminish as he drove home.

Linda stopped and looked round only when she felt sure that he would not see her. She stood for a moment, watching the tail-lights going down the avenue. George Dalvel was a strange man, different from the others she knew; it left her feeling for a moment that the others had now passed, that she had moved out of their orbit and would not see them again. To her he was of an alien, ardent seriousness which to Piet Krogmas and all the others would be contemptible. But if in this he was like Martin, he was more human, less remote than her brother—so far from being remote that there was an excitement left with her, and she felt as if a keen pleasure had been cut off too soon. She turned and went through the gate, and turned along the path that led behind the hedge to the kitchen garden and the servants' quarters.

Her room was clean and pleasant, but now it neither attracted her nor offered any comfort. The night was no longer alarming with its darkness; it invited into its huge warmth her whose present mood was too free and ill-defined to be contained in the small, lighted room, too vague to find anything congenial in anything but the emptiness of the night. There was so gentle and so vast an assuagement in the stars, and in the nearer massiveness of the dark, still, overlooking mountain. So she stood outside for a while, warm with the night, content with the placid darkness. If there had been enough adventure in her she would have turned and gone up the avenues toward the slopes where no houses were, and walked until weariness had brought her back to sleep. But there was no such adventure in Linda, so she stood by her door, held between the sympathetic night and the small room whose light was commonplace. It was a moment when all that unhappy defiance in her—which for many weeks had been a long, slow irritation—when it abated and she felt no conflict. Every disharmony disappeared. But she studied neither the cause nor the implication of it all, being with her unperspicacity still unaware of her real conflict.

There were lights in the house itself, on the upper floor where the bedrooms were. Linda looked that way and saw them as she finally turned and entered her own room. She thought of Nicholas Saunty and her own picture.

Chapter 7

LINDA was at Hout Bay the next week-end, staying with her aunt Maisie in the fishing village. She had come partly by Joe's persuasion, for he grabbed at any support which he could give to his own claims for a week-end's fishing. But Joe would never under any circumstances stay with his sister-in-law. It was freedom he wanted, and Frikkie Koekstra and his fishing-boat gave that. Certainly Maisie did not, for she had Martha's bulk and twice her tongue.

The week-end fitted in with Linda's mood. She was in such a confusion of mind that the village at the far edge of the bay, away from the beach where week-enders came, and under the shadow of the Sentinel rock, was a restful place. It was away from the pull of Wintering and her picture being painted; and George Dalvel, ten minutes with whom had complicated the tangle of things; and Dora, and Piet, and Nellie, and all the others who made the pattern of her former years.

She was watching Joe and his friends preparing their nets and embarking on the night's trip, Joe glorying in it. She stood on the small jetty and watched the boat swing out from the harbour, into the bay and then out between the Sentinel and Chapman's Peak to the Atlantic. It was still mid-afternoon, and the whole wide bay was deep blue and shadowless. Away along the shore where the hotels stood, and where the houses were being built in increasing numbers on the lower slopes of the mountain, people moved like sand-flies on the beach, darting about as she herself had often done when she had come for week-ends with the others. Often they had camped among the trees that fell back from the beach. When she had seen Frikkie's boat go out, Linda turned and walked that way, slowly, with no aim. The stream that came down through the short valley spread its broad, shallow, and inconstant

branches across the beach. She removed her shoes and carried them in her hand as she began to wade across.

She was picking her way carefully, looking down at the flowing water, and she noticed Piet and the others only when they were almost upon her. They had come down the road that joins the village with the world: Piet, Dora, Nellie, Jannie Harmel, Fortuna Alberts, and a few others, all of them Linda's friends, rivals, or acquaintances: care-free as a troupe of roving players. Piet was in the centre, playing an old guitar, and the others were shuffling and shimmying along with a loose rhythm inborn in these dark children of the Cape. They had taken the bright day into their hearts, and with their happiness they celebrated it. They had turned from the road to cross the wide stream, and they were very near her when she looked up.

Dora saw her and broke away, still with the dancing in her movements. "Linda, it's nice to see you! I didn't know you was coming here dis week-end. You didn't say so."

Linda glanced at the others as she thought of an answer. "I didn't know myself, Dora. I came wid Papa . . ." She broke off as Piet, stopping his strumming, shouted across to her.

"Hi, Linda! Nice to see you, men! Come end hev a good time."

Some of the others shouted and greeted her, but Linda saw Nellie stop and tug at Piet's arm, and saw him hesitate. Most of the others, having waved and greeted her, turned with Nellie and moved along the beach, still dancing and fooling. Linda felt a quick anger, and again her loneliness, at their light rejection of her, but most of all she was furious at Nellie's spitefulness and her present ascendancy. Then she turned to Dora, as she realised that her friend was still by her, pleading with her to come. For a moment she felt all the more closely drawn to this one unfailing friend, and for Dora's sake she wanted to laugh and go with the others.

"You don't hev to go beck to your auntie yest for a while, Linda. Oh come on Linda! We heving a lovely time!"

But it was no good now. The others were moving away,

as if they were deliberately forgetting her. Linda shook her head at Dora.

"Thenk yoa, Dora. It's nice of you, really, but I said to Auntie Maisie I would be beck soon. Yoa better go ahead end cetch them up." Linda smiled as best she could, and then turned to go back.

But Piet had stopped again, and was hurrying back toward her. "Linda, yoa not coming? Anyway, I come to arsk if yoa like to com' to Luna Park next week. Yoa got a night orf? Yoa remember we been larst year? W'at night yoa got orf?"

Suddenly Linda was glad, exultingly glad, and was determined to go with him. She hesitated no more than a second. "I can come Wednesday, Piet."

"Origat! Good! I meet yoa by de Royal Bioscope, eh? O.K.? Eight o'clock?"

Linda nodded, and with a wink and a click of his tongue Piet turned and hurried after the others.

She stood watching them, regretting her own foolishness in not going, but feeling a certain triumph, particularly over Nellie Sapeika. Nellie would sulk for the rest of the afternoon, and probe Piet's purpose in coming back to talk to her. Linda turned back toward the village with a lighter heart.

Once or twice in the next few days she regretted that impulse on the beach, as she moved about the rooms of Wintering, among the fine things that stirred too great and too frightening an ambition in her and made the cottage and Piet Krogmas and all her other life too dangerously shabby.

But on the Wednesday evening she went with Piet as she had promised, and once they were at the Luna Park, the night took her spirits and flung them into its hurdy-gurdy. Her reserve burst, and rose gaily on the bright lights that climbed the Wheel and the swings and sent their clamorous haze into the sky. Piet favoured the Whip, for it flung balance and reason to the wind, and made it easier and excusable for him to put his arm round Linda's waist. And she laughed as their bodies were flung together. The noise came like a huge guffaw and halloo to merry-makers

from the round belly of the earth, cowing the proper silence of the night, creating a vast company of din where no one should be alone. Girls squealed rapturously in the whirl of the swings and the electric crackle of the Dodg'em cars. Crowded feet made a constant shuffle over the trampled grass, and the cries of the gravel-voiced stall-keepers bellowed over the flat croak of the side-show men. And Linda laughed and squealed like all the others as the Whip pushed her tighter against Piet. They were back in their old friendliness again. When they stepped down and steadied themselves on the reeling ground her hair was blown and her face felt the tingle of the wind.

They pushed with the emerging crowd through the gap in the rails, and she could even smile at Nellie Sapeka, who walked past at that moment. Nellie was with three other girls, unaccompanied by any man yet. The four of them flounced past in line abreast, arms linked, giggling valiantly with a secret, independent confidence which was belied by the quick glances they threw about for any males still at a loose end in the crowd. When Nellie saw Piet and Linda her jealousy was plain in her face for a moment. Then she looked away quickly and laughed louder and more recklessly, and they all rollicked past, twisting into the crowd, their short skirts furling above their fat brown knees. Piet's eyes followed them for a moment before jerking back to Linda. But she had not noticed; the flush was still on her face, and she was looking about expectantly. The fair-ground had her whole attention.

"Come on, Linda. Let's jest walk a bit. See w'at's going on."

They merged into the drifting crowd. Piet took her hand, and she did not resist. They walked round the rails of the Dodg'ems and watched the gallants showing off, and laughed with derision when Jannie Harmel's car stopped ignominiously in the middle of the floor. Jannie looked round sheepishly, and they saw his mouth swear as he shook his fist at them, and they laughed louder.

"Yah, thet'll teach him, eh? Poor old Jannie! Come on, Linda, let's go end make some money. If we don't, we got to take it easy from now."

As they turned to go, Nellie and her friends came swinging round the corner and bumped into them with a medley of surprised squeaks. They were still by themselves, and were beginning to show the signs of it. One of them, tubby little Fortuna Alberts, was frankly in a bad humour, but Nellie fitted her features to a brave grin.

"Fency, men! Orlways seeing yoa, Linda! So many peoples here, end we been heving sech a time, end yet we orlways bump into yoa. It's a small world, eh!"

The other three cackled at the wonder of it, and repeated Nellie's clever observation as Nellie herself went on talking with the utmost heartiness.

"Yoa heving a good time, Linda? We seen yoa on de W'ip. Looking a bit scared, eh? Yoa didn't get sick? Yoa don' look too good now. It shows orl de make-up on yoa face, men." She shrieked with mirth, and turned to the others for confirmation, and they laughed with her.

Linda's anger flared up, but she managed to hide it and put on a countenance to match theirs.

"Scared? No, it was lovely. We been on twice. Hevn't yoa been on yet? I hevn' seen yoa, Nellie. Yoa should go —only with someone else; then it's fun. We seen Jannie Harmel on the Dodg'ems. Yoa should get him to take yoa with him. It's funny thet he fiesn't asked yoa."

Now it was Nellie's restraint that broke. The pretence left her face and her eyes flashed her jealousy.

"Yoa been twice! Hell, eh, Piet Krogmas, yoa got to spend some money w'en yoa bring a lady to de fair, eh! Yoa got to pay for getting w'at yoa waiting for orl night. Wid a lady it costs more, eh! Well, hev a good time." She laughed desperately, and turned away abruptly. The others smirked uncomfortably and sidled after her, all with the same slutish swing of short skirts, and together they disappeared into the crowd.

Piet looked sideways at Linda, then grinned, half in embarrassment and half in enjoyment at the scene. "Agh, come on, Linda. She don' know w'at she's saying. Oud Nellie is pretty yealous."

Linda did not answer. She could have scratched

Nellie's spiteful eyes out. The place, with its too strident noise, had suddenly become harsh and squalid. She followed Piet away from the jangling hurdy-gurdy of the Dodg'ems and the Whip, and walked indifferently along the line of shies and snooting galleries. They stopped to watch other people putting pennies on chequered boards and rolling balls down crooked chutes. But she took little interest, for she wanted to go home.

"Hev a try, Linda. Go on, men." Piet handed her some pennies. At first she hung back a moment, then, shrugging, took them and placed them, won two shillings back, and became more eager again. As she watched, the fair began to come alive once more. Piet followed her, and with the second sixpence won three shillings back. And now they were on the high road again, with the wind of pleasure blowing through the side-shows, and their eyes looking for all the new things they had not enjoyed yet. On the roundabouts they flew out over the noses of the crowd and grabbed the laughter out of the sky; the lamp-traced fairground-swing below them and they lorded over the small people shuffling there. The breeze coming from False Bay in the south blew fresh on their faces; the glow of Cape Town came over the shoulder of the mountain that rose up to its height, fell back to Constantia Neck, and rose up again to sweep past Muizenberg to the Cape of Good Hope. They rode the calliope gaiety like lords on painted horses.

They were pushing their way through the crowd from the swings to the stalls when suddenly the spoiler of it all bumped into them—or they bumped into him—no one could tell. He was a European, thick-set and thick-voiced. He was turning away from a stall at that moment, carrying in his arms two cheap tumblers and a china doll. In the collision the trophic fell and smashed, each against the other, on the trampled grass. There was a second's pause before the man swung on Piet.

"You fo . . . ! Watch your blerry step, *jong*! Where the blerry hell you think you're going, eh?" In the false light of coloured lamps his face was grey-blue. His breath stank.

Piet's first reaction was to apologise, but with the man's outburst he flared up. But then again, peering through the misleading light and seeing that the man was a European, he again restrained his temper from long instinct.

"Agh, sorry, men. I . . ."

"Sorry! It's too blerry late to be sorry! Look at the glasses! And the doll I won for my liddle girl . . .!"

The china head of the doll had broken off and rolled away and was staring up open-eyed from amidst the broken glass. The crowd had turned to enjoy the scene, and had edged away to leave a space around what promised to be a good fight.

" . . . You clumsy barstard! You got your eyes in the back of your head, eh!"

For a moment Piet's restraint broke.

"W'v don' yoa watch yoa step yoaself! If yoa don' bleddy look w'ere yoa going it's yoa own fault." But he was conscious enough of Linda beside him, and so he made to turn away and leave. Piet did not enjoy violence. He was capable of anger, but he was always quick to recollect prudence.

The other man, however, thought differently. He clapped his hand down on Piet's shoulder, and some jumbled expletive went out with it. As Piet turned he caught the first blow on his neck. The other's aim was a little uncertain, and the next blow was over Piet's ear. Even Piet could not ignore this. He ducked to avoid the next few swings. The immediate crowd opened out against the general press of people, and a murmur of pleasure arose. Linda backed against the nearest onlookers, but they held her exposed to the brawl, within reach of the wild, inept flailing of Piet and the uncertain lunging of his adversary. She felt shamefully conspicuous, and wanted again to get away, her gladness having been blasted away in a single moment.

The fight was not scientific. For different reasons the two were not coherent. For Piet it was a wild skirmish that had been forced on him—Piet's arts were not in fighting. He flung himself into this affair with desperation.

The crowd ducked and grunted with them, and sighed loud 'a-a-ahs' when a blow went home. They whooped with the pleasure of it, as the two fighters tripped and lunged and swung round in circles. More blows went wild than to their mark, but the blows that found their place on Piet were heavier than he gave, and he began to show and feel their effect. He became wilder, and the impartial crowd yelled their relish. Linda quailed from it, but was hemmed to it.

It could not last. Piet's opponent swung into a mighty attack, missed Piet by a foot, carried through until he had swung completely round, and fell. His outstretched hand caught one of the broken tumblers and he let forth a great bellow that silenced the crowd, and surprised no one more than Piet, and at the same moment someone at the back of the crowd gave a warning.

"Police!"

The crowd suddenly broke like scuffed sand, and Piet was left for a moment gazing with one good but bemused eye at his antagonist, who sat amid the broken glass solemnly studying the blood that dripped slowly from his fingers on to the doll's upturned face. Then Piet jerked himself out of his daze. He was about to hurry away into the crowd, forgetting Linda, but in looking round for some outlet he saw her behind him, grasped her arm, and pulled her after him. They hurried away and the crowd closed round them, in a moment everything was over. The two policemen, edging importantly through the crush of people, came upon the solitary man sitting confused and mumbling on a little island of grass, amid his broken trophies, with the blood still dripping from his fingers on to the doll's face. There was nothing they could do; so they helped him up, escorted him to the street, and sent him wandering home with no prizes.

When they had put enough people between themselves and the place of the fight, Piet stopped and released Linda's hand. He laughed through his swollen upper lip. "De silly barstard got a good lesson, eh Linda! Det'll teach . . ."

Seeing Linda's face he dropped the bravado. "Shelf we

go? Dere's too many people, eh? End too much bleddy noise. It's getting late also."

Linda only nodded, and turned to lead the way toward the street, and as they emerged from the fairground she was glad that they did not meet Nellie. She tried to recall whether the girls' faces had shown in the crowd around the fight, and because she could not be certain about it she could not feel easy. The dismal end of her evening had turned Nellie's envy into a vicious enjoyment, and her own enjoyment into humiliation, and because of this she hurried to get into the street before they met the girls again. The pleasure was finished. The fair-ground was again a garish spot of noise and turbulence in a night that had become drab. And Piet, poor Piet, was as drab and as spoiled as the night—with no vaunting now, no strong manliness, but subdued for the moment. And though for a moment Linda felt sympathy for him, she was now feeling sorry enough for herself not to care very much.

Piet felt a little better out in the neutral street, and as they moved up past the shops, and the noise of the fair receded, he regained a more confident air.

"Lucky de p'lice come, eh? I hed de bleddy fool in a lot of trouble. Got, dese people got a lot of cheek! Dey reckon dey own de place. But he learn his lesson, det one did! End in de end, even if it's de udder one w'at starts de trouble, it's me w'at de p'lice will grab. Yoa carn't hev a Coloured men getting into a fight wid a European! No, got, it's against de law! . . ."

He would have carried on in this way, but during a pause he noticed no response from Linda, who kept her eyes averted to the shop windows.

They walked some distance in silence before Piet took another line of approach, for by now even he sensed that the evening was frittering away to a dull end, and he was struggling to find some way of resuming it. For Piet remembered other nights, when Linda had been more complaisant, and since it was still quite early he was loath to let her go without putting up some fight. Piet was always a man with his eye on the main chance.

"Shell we hev some chocolate, eh, Linda? Or some

sweets. No . . . I know! We cen get some fish and chips in de shop down by de station. O.K.?"

Linda roused herself out of her apathy to answer him. "I don' know, Piet. Thenks very much, but p'reps it's getting a little late, end I got to get back to Wintering before it's too late. It was very nice, really, end I enjoyed it tonight."

"Agh, *nie*, Linda! It's still early, men! Dere's still a lot we cen do! We got de money we won, end we cen spend it still."

"Yes, but it's a long way beck to Riebeeck Evenue, end by the time we get there it will be late."

"Agh, yoa got plenty of time yet! We hev'n' been out togedder for a long time, Linda."

But as she persisted, he had to give in, and they turned up the side street that led away from Main Road toward the avenues, with Piet now putting up a rearguard that would hold his position with her for a future occasion. "Anyway, Linda, yoa coming along by de beach w'en we hev a party. We not sure yet, but some night we going along parst Muizenberg by False Bay—de whole lot of us. Yoa got to come, eh? It's going to be lots of fun, men."

Linda's reaction was to say 'No,' first and finally—to break off this faltering friendship, and to be finished with them all from now on, for she felt sick of this unpleasant tension that existed between her and the other girls. Tonight was almost the last straw. But it was not easy to do this, for it would mean breaking off into a loneliness which there was no one else to fill. And she admitted to herself that Piet had tried, that she was being a little ungracious in wanting to leave him and go home so early. By accepting this new proposal she could repay him and yet postpone from tonight any further obligation. So she promised.

When they arrived at the gate of Wintering, Piet waited expectantly before bidding Linda good-night, but when he saw no response from her he had the sense not to delay his departure.

"Don' forget den, eh, Linda? I let yoa know w'en we going down to False Bay. Well, so long, eh."

He turned and went back the way they had come, his

leather shoes clacking out his progress on the tarmac of the silent avenue.

Linda murmured her answering "Good-night", and turned into the drive that led into the wide courtyard. Coming into the shadow of the house, where the dark doors of the garages yawned open and where a faint light shone from the hall beyond the glass-panelled door of the small porch, she came into the influence of the place again. And it contrasted with tonight's events, with its calm and its assurance. It raised an intolerance in her, a false shame and a false pride.

"Who's there?"

She had stopped involuntarily and was gazing at the light beyond the door, and the sharp voice startled her. Peering toward the corner of the house where it had come from, she recognised it as that of Nicholas Saunty just as she saw his figure come away from the house into the pale light.

"I'm sorry, marster. It's on'y me, Linda."

"Oh, Linda. I thought it might have been a prowler. I'm sorry if I startled you."

His silhouette showed against the doorway as he stood facing her.

"You've just come in, have you?" She was relieved to hear that the sharpness had left his voice, to be replaced by an easier, friendly tone. "You've had the evening off? It's fairly early to be back, isn't it?"

"Yes, marster."

"It must have been a long walk for you, up from the town—particularly in the dark. Did you have to do it alone?"

"No, a friend came with me tonight. He's jst gone beck."

Nothing further came from him for a moment, and Linda was not quite certain whether she should move off toward her quarters. She was about to excuse herself uneasily when he spoke again.

"But I understand you don't live so very far from here—down below Kirstenbosch, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's not so far, marster. But . . . but I wasn't

home tonight. We been to a fair—Luna Park et Wittebommé.” Immediately she had said it, she wished that she had not done so, for it was of no consequence.

“Oh.”

In the one word alone there was a note of interest. Instead of dismissing her and returning to the house, he paused only a moment before following her on this line of conversation.

“They have them often, do they? I’ve never noticed a fair-ground down that way. I know they frequently used to have one down at the end of Adderley Street, in town.”

“This one is near by the Main Road, marster. They come quite often in the year and stay a couple o’ weeks. They go to the other places round Cape Town.”

She was making her answers automatically. Behind them her mind fumbled to perceive why he should trouble to stay and talk to her. When in the past weeks she had sat in a chair in his study at his bidding, and he had peered at her and dabbed at the canvas that stood between them, he had asked her things like this—about herself and her friends, and what they did. And now the shadow of a thought came up vague, promiscuous, in some way wonderful, from the back of her mind. It fluttered in the open for only a moment, and in sinking back it left her excited. . . . He was talking to her and asking her things which he need not ask. He could not do this without having her in his mind. And she was a girl, and was beautiful—she knew that. He had even touched her face once, to turn it to the light. . . .

“I’ve never been to a fun-fair.” He said it as if he had discovered something that he had overlooked before, like someone who collects experiences and files them in the cabinet of his memory.

“While you’re here, Linda, you might like to see your picture—now, that it’s finished. I’ve even had it framed.”

He turned toward the door. Linda remained where she was, held by the restraint habitual in her situation, and by an opposite emotion which, while it subdued modesty, yet frightened the larger part of her nature. Suddenly, in panic, she turned and began to hurry away towards the

garages and the servants' quarters, but he turned at the noise of her footsteps and stopped her.

"Don't bother to go round. You can come this way, Linda."

She felt that she was caught. At the door he stood aside and waited for her. She turned round and advanced with fearful timidity, and avoided looking at him as she passed into the house.

It was quiet inside. The silence was secure and untroubled, shutting off contact with crowds and the common pulse of the night, and in the silence there was a dignity that increased her ill-ease. Through a vague feeling of resentment she suddenly longed in the sorest furrows of her heart for this kind of peace, which was so remote from her; that there might be no stress and conflict, but an altogether remote graciousness, a strange and ordered dignity that she could hardly hold in her imagination.

Nicholas Saunty preceded her across the hall to the stairs, and without looking back he led the way up. The light now came from lamps fashioned into the wall of the stairs, behind wooden masks that had come home with Nicholas from journeys in Central Africa. By daylight they were ugly enough, these strange, stil' masks; by night they leered hideously, as if they held secrets.

These dead faces cut into Linda's other preoccupation. They brought to it a quality of solemn fantasy, as of a novice passing before the eyes of strange votive idols. She edged away to the banister of the stairs, and went a little faster to avoid them. Everything seemed too still and silent as she followed Nicholas Saunty to the top of the stairs and into the study.

He switched on the light and stood aside for her, and when she was inside, he passed her, brushing against her lightly, and went to the far corner of the room.

"I shan't keep you a moment, Linda. But I thought you'd like to see it. I'll bring it out into the light."

As he stooped to sort the canvas from behind the large desk, he glanced back at her. "Do come in. I shan't be a second."

She edged forward a little. Here she was in his domain,

where nothing was moved but that he moved it, where she had been bidden to dust things as they lay, and not to disturb them. Here was the one place in the house that in all its disposition showed the character of its master. It was tidy and ordered in the arrangement of those things which were its fixtures—but there was an overlying carelessness, even a flamboyance, about the strewn papers, the pictures, the wooden masks again. Linda waited. They were alone there, and she had been brought by him, and no sound came from the rest of the house.

"There we are." He held the framed canvas toward her, but, glancing at the light, he turned and placed it on a small table, leaning it against the wall beneath a bracket. Then he turned and put his hand on her shoulder, and drew her forward toward it.

As the thing had been taking shape, and as she had seen it then, Linda had felt some disappointment, for the picture was not according to her own estimate of herself. Now she had the same feeling of confusion. She felt that perhaps it was difficult to understand paintings, and that there was something which one had to know about them. But, above all, she now felt the touch of his hand upon her shoulder, which pushed every other thought to the back of her mind.

"Well, what do you think of it?"

She saw his head tilt to one side as he looked at it and openly admired it, and it occurred to her even in her confusion that he was a conceited man. She kept her eyes staunchly on the picture.

"It's . . . it's very nice, marster."

His next words brought to their pitch the emotions that had been built up in her from the moment he had asked her to come into the house.

"You really are a striking girl, Linda."

She turned her head away, trying to conceal the anguish which she felt must show in her face, and the trembling of her body, which she felt would betray her. He, however, was looking at the picture, holding it up a little toward the light and then setting it down again. He stood back from it and turned toward her. "Look at me, Linda."

She turned slowly, keeping her head down. When she

forced herself to look at him, it was only for a second before she dropped her eyes. But then again she looked up, slowly, and kept her head up. She did not know how to read the eyes of men like this. Piet and such men were the only ones she knew, and into Nicholas Saunty's gaze what feelings she read were from her own heart. He put his hand beneath her chin and lifted her head gently to the light. She felt that no man would do that who did not have the desire that she herself had at that moment, a desire of which she was afraid.

"Yes, you have a lovely face . . ."

With the same gentleness he moved his fingers over her forehead and her cheeks, as if feeling their texture, then over the pulse of her neck. And his eyes scrutinised her, searching her features so intensely that all at once she was touched by terror. The adventure suddenly outstripped her courage. The wantonness that she had been unable to restrain from her answering gaze was caught in a swift, instinctive fear.

Suddenly she sobbed, grasped his hand tightly to the curve of her neck, and let it fall as she turned and fled to the door and down the stairs, past the silhouetted wooden faces, along the dark kitchen passage, to her own room. There she threw herself on to the bed and wept.

Gradually, as she lay there, the security of her room tempered her distraction. She rolled over on to her back, and as her eyes moved round her own belongings, in the pale, secluding light, she regained assurance. Slowly she rose, unbuttoning her skirt and allowing it to fall unheeded to the floor. With mounting self-assurance she stripped, each garment falling luxuriously about her feet. She stepped naked before her mirror, and unashamed she exulted in the form and firmness of her body, which was the warm colour of honey.

Chapter 8

SOMERSET WEST is only thirty miles across the Flats, lying back into Parel Vallei and hidden from direct view of Table Mountain by the round-topped spur that comes south from Stellenbosch toward False Bay. It has always held itself aloof, ever since the time when Governor Adriaan van der Stel moved out from Cape Town and had his country place at the farm 'Vergelegen' in this valley. It is still aloof, standing back from the National Road that comes out from Cape Town, and passes near-by before going over Sir Lowry's Pass and along the south coast of the country.

The town lies beneath the Hottentot's Holland Mountains, and is gracious with trees. Its real estate values are high now. But for Martin Bax it had no attraction. He had come grudgingly, to pay his debt to George Dalvel. It was a fine opportunity, they all said, and he knew they were right. He knew that this should be the end of the discouragement that had settled on him when he was inactive at home, and he was all the more disheartened because now, even with this opportunity, he seemed to have achieved nothing. For, day by day, awakening, working, and awaiting sleep since he had come here there had been a heaviness on his mind, to which he could put no cause. There was an absence of something in the face of which, day by day, his spirit had staled. First there had been a period of submission, with each morning coming like a person in a crowd, and passing unseen. It had been like a long street by fog-light, with all things—all roads, all buildings, all people, all incidents—muffled. He had walked there, down the long street, coming to no end of the fog, to no green country, no place where the sun was; he had forgotten there was a sun. And the heaviness invaded his nights, making him toss sleeplessly.

Some days he would go to the top of the spur, from where

he saw the wide bay that went away to the southern edge of the world. It, too, was grey, between enclosing grey mountains. He would bring his eyes up along the far rim of the sea, where the Peninsula was, along where the mist over the Flats was like the sea continued, and where Table Mountain rose like another land made inaccessible. His eyes would pause there, and after a while he would turn away and drag his feet with resignation, back to the valley.

The mood made him uncommunicative and apparently unfriendly, so that he alienated those who might have become his friends. They left him more and more to himself, when the need was for him to have friendship. And he knew that it was his own fault.

When George Dalvel came out to Somerset West—ostensibly to visit the friends who had been responsible for finding this job for Martin, but really to see how Martin was—he saw quickly enough the failure of his own effort to make Martin happy.

The two of them took a walk along the tree-lined streets of the village, past the large-gardened houses where people played tennis and laughed, out along the dirt road that led up the valley.

“Somerset West is growing pretty fast. Before the war I remember none of these places were here.”

“I suppose so.” Martin did not even bother to look.

“But it’ll always be a small place, which is a good thing. Where you can go easy because everything moves slower. I wish I could teach here.”

“There’s not much in Somerset West.”

“I don’t know, Martin. It’s a nice place. And there’s a job, which is something to be grateful for.” George could not prevent this from slipping out. He hurried on, to cover what he saw to be an unkindness. “And it’s not far from Cape Town, after all.”

Martin looked at George for the first time during this walk.

“Yoa got a car, George. It’s far if you hev’n got one.”

And George understood then that it was Cape Town that

Martin missed. And Cape Town was home . . . and Martha. George turned earnestly to Martin, and tried to argue with him.

"Look, Martin; I know perhaps a job in Cape Town is better as far as you are concerned. But you know how it is there. It's not easy. But any time you want to come home for a week-end from here, I can come, perhaps on a Saturday, and get you. Or you can always get a lift on a lorry on the main road, and I can bring you back in the car. I . . ." But George's voice trailed off. He had no conviction himself.

And Martin, understanding his friend's dilemma, without being able to solve it, answered, "I'm sorry, George."

The sun was behind the spur, and the shadows gave an excuse for their return to Martin's lodging. George knew that he had settled nothing by coming, and that he would do no good in staying now. He could only hope that things might improve on their own.

For a few minutes he could not help feeling annoyed by it all, by Martin's stubbornness, which was really a weakness. George himself would have liked to work there—he had meant it when he had said it. The shadowing oaks and their quietness made more odious for him the recollection of the mean streets below the railway line at home, and the rush and clamour that surrounded his life as a school-master.

This first period of Martin's perversely stubborn submission ended. Then cynicism came, and soured into indignation. He made mistakes at his work, and resented the rebukes that followed. One day he dropped a forme of type, and when the type-setter stormed up, full of abuse, Martin stood by eyeing sullenly the heap of metal on the floor, working up in his own mind abuse which he was afraid to voice aloud.

. . . Type! Lumps of lead to go mad about! Small, unimportant, futile stuff! To print something on paper that would be glanced at, crumpled, thrown away, blown in the wind along gutters, mushed to nothing by rain. Two hours' work wasted! And will you or I die two hours early or late?—Be jealous of your hours! It took a million years

to shape the ancient furrows on the faces of the mountains and wear them down smooth and round to the low hills.— Take your type and re-set it in all the languages under the sun!—

That was in his mind; in his face was nothing but sullen indifference.

Then, a few days later, it happened a second time, and the foreman came storming up again.

“What the hell, Baart! What’s the matter with you? You’re half awake these days! Why do you think I sit there . . .”

Martin stood for a moment without a word. Then, without a word, he untied his apron, flung it on a bench, turned away, and left the curses to flap in the air. He went out into the street and walked to the house where he lodged, packed his few things, left money on the table to pay for his week’s keep, and returning to the road, he walked down toward the highway that led straight back to the living streets of home.

A Coloured lorry driver, who had driven far and was glad to be in sight of home swung his vehicle past Martin and drew into the side of the road. He leaned out of the cab and shouted back.

“Want a lift, *kerel*?”

Martin hurried forward and climbed into the cab, mumbling his thanks.

“Yoa been hiking?”

“Hiking? Oh . . . yah, I’ve been hiking.”

“Lovely day, eh? Good wedder we heving. Yoa going so far es Cape Town?”

“Yah, I’m going to Cape Town.”

“Oright. We won’t be long; *kerel*. Yoa hed a good day?”

“I hed a good day, thanks.”

He had already forgotten Somers West. As they rattled along, the narrowing road widened for them and fell behind, and the immense shape of the mountain filled more of the sky in front of them, and he was glad. Devil’s Peak emerged from the single outline and stood proudly in its own right. While they were still a mile out into the Flats

they came into its shadow, and already the atmosphere was more friendly.

"I got to go up by Maitland. Det's oright for yoa, *kerel*?"

"Yah. Don' mind about me."

"Then I got to go on 'to Burg Street. O.K.?"

"Thet's fine. Thanks."

Martin was not concerned about the way. He was enjoying the crowded street. The lorry swung to the right, away from the foot of the mountain and toward the shore of the bay. There they came into the stream of traffic on the North Road, and Martin felt the quickening and complexing of things. But as they came toward the centre of the city and the end of the journey he began to feel doubtful, having lost the certainty of his purpose. If home was his goal, then his way was round the flank of the mountain, toward the southern suburbs, but he allowed himself to be carried the other way, into the city itself.

The driver dropped him at the bottom of Hanover Street, under the walls of the Castle. And here again, instead of turning back along 'sir Lowry Road, southward through the long straggle of the outer city, he hesitated and finally turned toward the heart of it. There it was easier to lose himself, to become nobody in the crowd. He walked, indeterminate and purposeless, along the streets that bustled with a thousand private purposes.

Small urchins dashed past him selling afternoon papers with voices like rooks cawing. "A-argy! A-a-argy! A-a-argy!" As dark as rooks they were, perched on kerbs at street corners, darting and pecking for tuppences flung by people in a hurry. "A-a-argy!"

Martin walked up Adderley Street, up the Avenue in the Gardens. But empty old men were sitting there, and old women who were unsightly, and children to whom everything was still simple and straightforward. So there was no refuge here in the Gardens, and he soon turned back to the oblivious streets.

He went down St George's Street, and like a stray shuttle in the weave of the crowd he threaded his way down to the bottom of the street. There one way led to the docks and the other back to the station. He turned toward the

station, at last being pulled by an underlying admission that there was nowhere else to go. He walked through the station and along the length of a train which was due to leave. The legend "Europeans Only" on the first coaches sharpened the bitterness of his mood. During the journey he sat in a corner, and avoided contact with anyone else.

He was walking through the sub-way after leaving the train at Clareview station when he heard a familiar greeting.

"*Hoe gaan dit, Baart? Beck again, eh!*"

Johnnie Peterson swaggered up behind him, the habitual grin on his face. He put his hand comrade-wise on Martin's shoulder.

On hearing the raucous voice and recognising its owner, Martin, to his own surprise, felt a quick pleasure—the first during that day and the many before it. Johnnie was colourful. He came like a rich, round knave out of a Droll Story—no pallid, acquiescent undertaker of a man ready to accept dead things and make the worst of them. He was a sudden bright beam in the grey light, measuring and nourishing the glow of melancholy mutiny lately kindling in Martin. He was complementary to this new mood. Martin was timidly glad to see him, and smiled in answer.

"Hallo, Johnnie."

"So yoa been away, eh? Yoa is out by Somerset West dese yar days. S' nice et Somerset West. S' quiet, eh?"

Glancing to see if Johnnie was serious, Martin saw that he was not. Johnnie seemed to scorn simple attitudes, and now there was mockery in his features, and Martin was provoked to deny him the pleasure of his mockery.

"Yah, quiet. End why not? No use rushing round with no time for anything. It don' get yoa now'ehc." As he spoke, he lapsed into the way of speech common to Johnnie and his type.

"Yoa don' get' now'ere not he'ag no yob eider, eh? Yoa got a good yob et Somerset West?"

Martin was aware now that Johnnie, with his shrewdness, had already correctly interpreted his own reappearance in Clareview, with his small suitcase. And Johnnie was quizzing him in the merciless manner of those who live

by being hard. That Johnnie was not being really malicious did not prevent Martin from reverting a little toward his earlier mood of self-commiseration and anger.

"I hed a yob." He looked straight at Johnnie. "But not now."

As they went through the station gates into the road, Johnnie continued airily, blowing cheap cigarette smoke through the side of his mouth and tilting his head back without seeing the mountain that filled the sky in front of him. Johnnie had never really seen the mountain that had always stood over his line. He had never thought of it.

"W'at's doing now den, eh? Got to work. O-oh, yah, got to work! Got to be a good citizen, like yoa read in the paper. Dere's lots of yobs going--cerry a ledder for someone, men, or hend a fellow a hemmer to knock in a nail, w'at needs a lot of skill--p'reps some day dey give yoa a hemmer or yoaself. Or get a bicycle end cerry parcels for a butcher." There was a hafter note in his voice. "Yoa don' want no books, Baart. Dey no good for nobody."

They walked for a few paces before he continued in an elaborately casual tone: "But p'reps dere is udder ways, Baart. It's yest a metter of knowing de right way."

Before Martin could understand what he meant they had come into the street where the Eclipse Hairdressing Saloon was. The loafers were there, having come from their grimy jobs, having put away their dust-carts. As the long, busy Main Road--whose other end had been the Sir Lowry Road where Martin had left the lorry--as this long stem of traffic had begun to quicken with the end-of-afternoon bustle, these discarded husks of men had been shed from the living stalk and come floating to the side streets, to sit on the kerb-sides and the low walls, to joke and cackle away the tail of the day. To the preoccupied, hurrying-to-get-home-for-late-tea European suburbanites these men were fit to be stepped round hastily and passed by. To the young policemen who came that way they were annoying litter, free so long as they constituted no nuisance according to the manuals of the Law. And the wall-squatters and

gutter-loafers cared not a pumpkin pip. Every woman who had the temerity to go that way was eyed and estimated for the purposes of fornication. The smart, short-skirted Coloured girls would giggle and simper past, and the old hags as hard as toads would scatter the gallery with the swing of a horny hand, and would waddle on, cackling. Rex, the shaggy collie dog, was there too.

As on that earlier occasion, weeks before, Johnnie now tried again to get Martin to stay and have a hair-cut.

"Yoa is needing one, baart. Yoa been out in de country so long, yoa look like yoa need a grass-cutter, men." He brushed his hand up the back of Martin's head and chuckled. "Agh, come on. Dere ain't no barber in Somerset West like oud Fennie Dinkle. Yoa look es if yoa ain't htd a hair-cut since yoa gorn away."

To Martin this was an excuse, something to keep him from arriving defeated at the door of the cottage, from facing Martha with the need for explanations. Arriving now, suddenly and with his weakness apparent, there would be a need to justify himself—even though he knew that Martha would say nothing and Joe would shrug and shy away from the awkwardness of reproaching him. If he stayed here for a while he would remain responsible to no one except his own conscience. So he yielded, and Johnnie pushed him triumphantly through the half-doors into the room that rattled with the noise of scissor-strokes.

There were two old arm-chairs—neither occupied—and a bench, along one wall; the padding and springs showed in the chairs, and the bench was unpainted. In front of two small mirrors on the other wall were two wooden chairs, in which sat two half-shorn clients. Over them hovered two barbers in soiled white coats, their arms poised elbow-bent as they turned to glance at the newcomers. They both smiled their recognition, and one—who was short and spare-bodied, with a slight squint—nodded, and greeted Johnnie with a "*Hoe gaan jy, Johnnie.*"

Johnnie nodded in return, inclined his head toward Martin, and announced, "New customer, Fennie. How's business, eh?"

Fannie shrugged, and took a savage lunge at his customer's close-curved head. "Agh, oright, *kerel*."

Martin sat on the bench, and Johnnie slumped carelessly into one of the arm-chairs.

It was a small place, crowded with the chairs, a wash-basin, cupboards, and all the tackle of a barber's shop. There was hardly room to move. The two customers, wrapped in voluminous, dingy white sheets, took up much of the room.

Martin was not at ease. His new defiance was tempered by his unfamiliarity with defiance. He sat hunched on the bench, sinking into the anonymity of all men waiting in barbers' shops, while Johnnie held intermittent talk with Fannie the squint-eyed barber.

"Mennie Porter was doing bleddy fine on Saturday, eh Fennie?"

"Yah." Fannie nodded over his shoulder, but continued snipping. "Was on de tote, eh?"

"Yah. De double, men! Fifty-five pounds!"

"But where's he put de morey? I ain't seen him buying nobody a drink so far. Gif it to some bleddy woman, I suppose."

"Or some woman take it of him. He's got a new one I hear of, et Retreat. Sadie Wernick—big end fet. . ."

"End comfortable, eh?" Fannie winked into the mirror.

Then, as if it were part of the barbering operations, he went round the front of the chair, opened one of the cupboards, and took out a square-shaped bottle with the label of a smelly brilliantine. But instead of tipping some of it through the usual narrow opening into the palm of his hand, he pulled out the cork. And with the same unfurtive movement the ensrouded customer brought his hand out from beneath the sheet, showing it to hold a glass—a cheap, thick, grimy glass, which he held out in front of him. Fannie glanced at the doc—the only sign yet of guardedness—and quickly poured out a tot of brilliantine. Then the hand, the glass, and the bottle disappeared again without fuss, and the barbering continued.

Martin had hardly time to focus his startled attention on the operation before it was over. He jerked forward on the

bench, then glanced a little self-consciously at the others. No one said a word, or made a sign that anything remarkable had happened. Martin sank back against the wall again, embarrassed by his simplicity, hoping that it had not been noticed.

Just then the second customer finished a drink that came out magically from under his sheet, and his barber collected the glass, rinsed it in the basin with the same nonchalance, and returned it to the cupboard before whipping the sheet away. The shorn one rose, paid, and walked to the door. Johnnie turned to Martin and winked.

From outside Rex, the collie, began to bark. Everyone in the shop carried on as before, though Fannie's scissors may possibly have worked more violently. The cupboards were all closed, the customer still in the chair was scrupulously innocent as he bent his head under Fannie's hard hand. Johnnie began to sing softly, as if to himself, with a grin on his face.

"Da-ar kom die Aliba-ama!"

"Aliba-ama kom oor die see-ee-ee!"

"Da-ar kom Consta-able Ha-amer! . . ."

Rex's barking moved down the street a little, then stopped. He had ushered Constable Hamer along, and everything was quiet again, excepting the noise of Fannie's scissors.

"Oud Rex is a bleddy clever dog, eh Fennie? Good for burglars. Picks out de bed types w'at make a nuisance round de place." As he said it Johnnie was leaning back in his chair, studying the ceiling with enjoyment.

The second barber turned to Martin, waving the loose hairs from the much-used sheet. "O.K. Next."

Martin hesitated, but there was no way out now. He lifted himself from the bench and went to the chair. The sheet went billowing round his neck, and the singular routine of the Eclipse Saloon went on. Instead of taking up the clippers, the barber went to the cupboard, opened it, took out a quart-sized bottle of hair-restorer, and turned to Martin with an interrogating lift of one eyebrow. For a

moment Martin failed to understand, then he remembered. Again he hesitated before shaking his head and mumbling awkwardly into the folds of the sheet. Johnnie's voice interjected from behind, plain with amusement:

"Go on men, Baart. Crows hair on yoa t'roat. It parses de time, men. End it's cheap." And without waiting for objections, he nodded to the barber. "Yah, it's oright. Willie, cerry on. I'm paying for dis."

So the glass was half-filled and thrust on Martin. The cupboard door was shut on the hair-restorer, and the barbering began. When eventually Johnnie took the next seat he required no asking; he was an old customer. His glass was under the sheet and Fannie was snipping away almost before the door had swung to behind the last customer.

As everyone settled down again, Martin collected a sort of confidence, and he found himself smiling at this elaborate mockery. To mark his growing easiness he unwound his arm from the sheet, held his breath, and took a sip of the liquid in the thick glass. His momentary composure was shattered by a sudden explosion in his gullet. He choked, and almost dropped the glass. He struggled hard to keep steady while the flaming stuff went down his throat and burned his inside. It was hardly less than raw vinegar that Fannie Dinkle dispensed with his hair-cuts . . . for a moment in his anguish Martin feared that perhaps it *was* hair-restorer. He coughed to avoid a splutter. Willie the barber stepped back with a look of concern, then patted Martin lightly on the back.

"Got men, yoa oright? Watch yoa don' spill any, eh? W'atsit? P'reps a bit of hair get in yoa t'roat? Yoa got to be careful, men. Keep yoa udder hend across de glarss so es to keep de hair out. O.k. now, eh?"

The attack subsided. Martin grinned weakly, and settled into the chair again. From then on the operation was allowed to continue smoothly, for before each subsequent sip he screwed up his nerves to receive it. And between sips he could not help grinning again at this casual impudence behind swing-doors, aided and abetted by a shaggy collie dog.

In a short while they were finished. Johnnie paid for everything rendered, and they strolled out into the street, turning up toward the Main Road. With the wine burning in his belly, and the sharp taste of it still in his mouth, Martin turned to ask Johnnie the question that had come to his mind as Willie the barber was completing the haircut.

"Why the drinking in there? Yoa cen buy a bottle in a shop. There's nobody to stop yoa drinking anywhere else."

Johnnie shrugged. "Agh, I don' know. Yoa get a good kick from it. It's fun, men. A little bit of sport—between Fennie end Rex end de bleddy constable from de police station up Bridge Road." He looked at Martin and laughed. "Yoa don' t'ink so, eh?"

"Oh, I suppose so. I suppose it's a bit of a joke."

There was a short silence between them, which Johnnie ended by continuing in a casual tone: "W'at yoa going to do now, Baart? Arfter heving no yob et Somers't West?" Martin had been trying to avoid the thought, but he knew that it was Johnnie's purpose to make him face it.

"Oh, I don' know yet. Something will come along."

"It didn' come before. Yoa t'ink maybe t'ings will be better now?"

There was a further silence, while Johnnie found his next thrust. "We got a sort of business, Baart. Lots of odd t'ings coming along. We don' wait for anyone else to come along and give us a yob. We find dem ourselves." He saw Martin glance at him, questioning. "Surprised, eh? Yah. Well, det's de great t'ing. We work w'en we like it, so p'reps yoa never notice it."

"We?"

"Yoa int'rested, eh? Yah, we got on'y two of us now. A partnership, men!" He said it with his constant, mocking grin.

"Yoa never look es if yoa got a lot to do, Johnnie. . . ."

A note of despair came into Johnnie's voice. "Got, men, I'm yest telling yoa! We work so long es we want, end w'enever we want. We got plenty to do if we want to keep busy orl de bleddy time, but w'at's de point, men!"

"But what sort of work?"

"O-oh, oud clothes, sometimes fruit—epples, grapes, peaches—sometimes even flowers—'Yoa like some lilies, medem? Very nice lilies. Or some merigolds?'—Yoa got to be polite, Baart, like a yentlemen. Yoa carn't never swear et a lady w'en yoa want her to buy somet'ing. She don' like it. Teaches y' a menners. P'reps if she don' buy some flowers yoa go beek in de night end take some from' her garden—It's yustice, men. But sometimes it's different work. Sometimes we go to de raccs—not exectly for working, maybe, but we get money—specialised yob." Once again he grinned.

His next words, after a pause, were spoken with an emotion that startled Martin, as if Johnnie had taken a moment to heat them in his mind.

"Listen, Baart. Yoa see how far yoa get w'en yoa wait for someone wid a nice kind heart to come along end give yoa t'ree hundred pounds a year end a nice yob. Yoa got to find yoa own money dese days! Yoa's 'a clever sort of *kerel*. Yoa's reading a lot of books. Oright! Is it any good? Does a big fet Ikey come along end say, 'Yah, *kerel*, I see yoa got a lot of brains. I cen pay yoa maybe twenty pounds a mont' for dem'? Yoa got a bleddy charnce! For us, brains is wasted! Baart, yoa's a bleddy fool!"

Having spat out the last words, he suddenly changed again. The violence, of which this was the first sign that Martin had seen, subsided, and the grin reappeared.

"Yah, Baart. Well, if yoa hev trouble to find some'ting to do, yest come along end find me. Oud Papa Peterson is de one. We cen do wid a bright boy w'at hes a lot of brain. Maybe we cen start a partnership sometime. Big business—'Peterson end Baart'—ch?"

Johnnie turned off at the street corner and jaunted away, his hands in his pockets, his cap on the back of his head. Martin continued toward home, pondering the afternoon's events. For a long time his discontent had swirled about, unfixed to any cause. It had not yet got as far as a grudge, for he had reasoned out no concrete antagonism. It had turned in on itself, darkening in its

own gloomy turbulence and losing there the mark to which it might have been fastened, but now out of Johnnie's outburst there began to form some point about which a grudge could grow.

Martin followed the road automatically, up the Avenue, then down into the valley where smoke was in the dark trees, and the cottages squatted in the dusk at the foot of the mountain.

Chapter 9

GEORGE DALVEL stopped his car at the side of the road opposite the Baarts' cottage. There were children playing nearby in the late dusk—snuffly, ill-clad children who would come, the moment he went over to the cottage, and paw the car, drawing shapeless things in the dust on its surface. But being at the moment concerned with other things, George crossed the road and entered the gate.

Martha was there. She had come at the sound of the car, for people did not stop idly on this road, and she was not one to pretend dignity. Her face, being so equipped with its superfluity of flesh whereon moles grew, and its growths of downy dark hair, could effectively conceal her emotions in its expanse, but when she saw who this was her pleasure was plain enough. As she stood waiting for George on the flagstone step, her features screwed up into a grin that was formidable only to those unaccustomed to it.

"Good evening, Mrs Baart."

"Evening, Mr Darvel. We hev'n been seeing yoa for a long time. It's nice of yoa to come."

"Thank you, Mrs Baart. I hev been here once or twice, but there was nobody et home."

"Agh, I'm very sorry. Come end sit down." She led the way in. "I'm wor'ing on Mondays end Wednesdays end Fridays—on Mondays end Wednesdays I'm going to do washing for a medem, end on Fridays I'm helping Mr Isaac since poor oud Emmie Sapeika been dead. But on T'ursdays I'm et home, Mr Darvel, to look arfter my own house. Yoa got to take care of yoa own place, eh?" Good humour deepened the creases about her eyes and mouth. "End quite offten Linda is getting orf on T'ursdays end is coming home. She's coming tonight."

George was all the more pleased that he had come, though it had been for another purpose that he started off.

"Mrs Baart, someone told me Martin hes come beck from Somerset West. I thought I would come end see if thet's right. I thought maybe I would cetch him, if I came along here, end hev a chet with him. I hev'n't seen him for a while."

Martha's immobile expression contributed nothing to the bare words that she answered. "Yah, he's beck. But he's not here now, Mr Darlvel. He's not et home much lately—yest in de morning, end late et night. He might come soon if yoa cen wait."

"So he's got a job now?"

"Well, p'reps. I don' know really. He don' ever say much about it. He was saying et first, w'en he come beck from Somerset West, det dere was a yob wid Johnnie Peterson—selling t'ings. But I don' know w'at he's really doing."

Standing by the door of the kitchen, Martha gave no impression of desiring sympathy for herself in her dilemma, nor any hint of that confusion which she felt in the drawing away of her son. It was a perplexity, which she herself would not examine and wonder over, but would accept as she accepted each day and each night.

"Martin was never talking much—orlways keeping t'ings inside him. Yoa know him p'reps from w'en yoa teach him et de school, Mr Darlvel. End it's de same since he come beck from Somerset West. Et first w'en he come beck he was sitting round end not going out much. He didn' do not'ing. Den arfter t'ree or four days he was starting to go out, end he says he got some work wid Yohnnie Peterson. End from den on we don' see him much in de day-time. If yoa like to sit down I cen get some cawffee to drink, Mr Darlvel, end p'reps he will come soon. . . ."

"No, please don't trouble, Mrs Baart. . . ."

"No trouble. No trouble. If yoa go away now maybe yoa will miss him. End Linda is p'haps coming soon—she's coming to sleep tonight becorse she didn' hev a day orf larst week. I'm sorry Yoe isn' here. He's gorn wid a friend to play cards. But yest sit so long, Mr Darlvel. De cawffee won' be long."

She saw him seated in the best chair, beside the huge wireless. Before vanishing into the back room she turned and nodded at the instrument.

"Yoa cen put on de wireless, Mr Darvel. We got a bettery in now. Please excuse me, eh?"

She left him making his polite thanks. He sat on the edge of the chair, and instead of switching the radio on, he fell involuntarily into a half-reverie.

The small room crowded about him, pervaded by the same gentility as that of blowsy women drinking tea from thick cups, with their little fingers outstretched. George felt a pathetic melancholy overhanging the room, and the feeling increased his sense of failure. There was no anchor in such a place for a young mind fixed to no true course, whose load was a loose heap of disappointments. There was no sanctuary in this room. It was no place for living—only the bare bones of a room with no warm body or soul, a common little box, empty of spiritual grace, full of vulgar little trophies snatched in the teeth of poverty. The only bonds in this house were the ones between Martha and each of the others separately; there were none between them all. From Martha Baart the others stemmed—Joe loosely, Linda more closely, and Martin and young Francis the closest of them all. And now she said that Martin was drawing away. Martin still returned because he was not yet able to keep away. After his absence at Somerset West his home-coming was still a relief because the comfort of it had covered over his unhappiness. But now the comfort was staling and the old mood of melancholy revolt was returning—a mood which had gathered a dismal strength in the time that was like an exile at Somerset West. George blamed himself for not having foreseen this, for having foiled his own intentions.

Yet for the moment George did not know how to improve things. Having heard that Martin had returned home, and having guessed why, he had come to the cottage fearing to hear the kind of news that Martha had given him, but with no idea of what to do when his fears were confirmed. In a crisis like this there was no quick, mastering course of action, as there is when a man is

drowning. There was, instead, the delicate, patience-wanting task of getting to a boy's heart and lightening it. And George Dalvel began to feel that he lacked the confidence and the means to do this. He sat in the crowded room, dismayed by the need and by his failure to meet it.

Linda did not notice the car until she was about to cross the road by the cottage. Then, having seen its outline in the darker shadow of the trees—the children had by now been dragged indoors—she stopped a moment, wondering whose it was. When she recognised it and realised that George Dalvel would be in the house, she advanced more slowly to the gate, touching her hair and straightening her jacket. She felt some pleasure, but at the same time she was a little displeased, for she was not prepared for it, not having changed before leaving Wintering, knowing that she was going straight home. For a moment she felt annoyed that she should have had no warning. But it was too late for that now, so she continued toward the door. She entered, and stood a moment at the half-opened door with the darkness behind her.

"Good evening, Mr Dalvel. . . . I . . . I saw the car in the trees, but I was not sure that it was yours."

George jumped up, with his pleasure evident in his face. She was welcome enough for her own sake, but coming at this moment she also lifted him out of his dejection. He noticed none of the faults she had imagined in her own appearance outside. As both of them stood there facing each other he lost the intimacy of the first quick pleasure, and lapsed into a certain discomfort.

"Good evening, Linda. . . . Yes. . . . I came a few minutes ago. Your mother said that perhaps Martin would be coming soon, so she asked me to wait. . . . She's in the kitchen now." He was able to smile. "She . . . also said perhaps you would be coming . . . because you had the evening off."

Linda closed the door behind her. But that took up little time, and gave no alternative to conversation.

"Yes . . . I cen stay home tonight. . . . Hev yoa come to see Martin?"

At that moment Martha entered from the kitchen, to relieve both of them.

" . . . End so Mr Darlvei is waiting for Martin to come, Linda. I told him to wait a little end hev some cawffee so long. It's lucky, Mr Darlvel; I been making some nice cakes—wid w'ite flour."

She handed him a cup, and the plate of small cakes. He remained standing while he took one, and for some minutes afterward.

"They look very nice, Mrs Baart."

"Yes, Martin likes dem, but Yoe don' care. Yoe don' appreciate anyt'ing; everyt'ing is orl de same to him. End yoa mustn't call me Mrs Baart, eh. Yoa mus' call me Mart'a, Mr Darlvel."

George smiled awkwardly.

"End my name is George."

Martha smiled in return.

The room was crowded with the three of them. But, feeling no awkwardness, Martha nodded toward Linda.

"Yoa didn' know Linda hed her picture painted, Mr Darlvel—by de marster of de house w'ere she's working."

Linda blushed and murmured something, but Martha took no notice.

"Yah, en yoa said larst week w'en yoa been home one evening dey maybe he's putting it in an exhibition, Linda? Not so?"

"Well . . . yes Mama, but . . . it wasn' for certain. End anyway . . ."

George, who suddenly showed an unusual interest, blurted out, "Oh, I wonder . . . I mean, I was going to say that there's an exhibition in Cape Town—beginning tomorrow. It's organised by a group that I know Mr Saunt'y is a member of. Is he showing the picture there?"

It was Martha's turn to show interest. "Yoa know Mr Saunt'y?" She turned to Linda. "Maybe det's so, Linda. Mr Saunt'y didn' say anyt'ing?"

"No, Mama, he didn' say anything definite." From her confusion, and from a slight exasperation at her mother's

persistence, Linda's voice had a note hard enough to cause a moment's embarrassment. George hesitated, then seemed to collect courage. "I thought perheps you might like to go end see it, Linda."

"O! yah! Yoa go, Linda. Det's a good idea, Yeorge." Martha chuckled. "Lots of peop'e coming to see w'at yoa look like. Yah, yoa must go, Linda. It's vry nice of Yeorge to arsk yoa."

Linda was caught by surprise. On top of her previous confusion this now brought more. Pride and excitement and irritation and pleasure were all mixed.

"But . . . but we don't even know if the picture is there."

"We could still go end see. I would be going myself in any case. I know the place; it's in Church Street. End the exhibitions are interesting. Since it starts tomorrow, we could go any time soon, to make certain."

"Cen we really go, though? They will let us in?"

When Linda said this George felt a quick, inarticulate anger at the assumption of inferiority which was a mark of his own people. But it was too slow to come to his tongue, and he replied with his usual moderation. "Yes, oh, yes; anybody cen go. In fact, some of the people you see there are quite funny, if you watch them."

"Yah, well, Linda, yoa must go den, even if de picture isn' dere." So Martha settled it. "Yoa got de day orf tomorrow. P'reps yoa cen go den, Yeorge?"

"I'd like to. Could it be in the afternoon, about half-past three? I hev school in the morning. I could come for you in the car, Linda, end we could go into Cape Town from here."

Neither Martha nor Linda objected. Having a car come to the cottage seemed to put the whole proposal beyond question.

After this their talk became desultory again, both George and Linda feeling the presence of the other. And since after a while it looked as if Martin would be late, George rose to take his leave.

"I mustn't keep you any longer, Mrs . . . Martha. Perheps I might see Martin again soon."

"I'm sorry yoa been waiting orl d's time. I don' know

w'at Martin is doing dese days. I'm sorry he's kep' yoa waiting, but I'll tell him, end maybe yoa cen see him tomorrow."

Martha saw him to the door, and from the patch of pale lamp-light that shone through its opening she bade him good night. George would have liked Linda to go with him, anywhere, so that they might have the evening together, for it was a physical enchantment that she had. But she murmured her good-night from the doorway, and when he turned to wave good-bye at the gate she had disappeared, and Martha was turning back into the house. Still, he felt good, for now there was tomorrow to look forward to.

He crossed the road. No one was about now, and only the dim lights shone from the windows of the cottages among the trees.

"Hallo, George." It was a dull voice, as featureless as a thud, but he knew it. It came from below him. Martin Baart rose to his feet from the narrow running-board of the car.

"Hallo, Martin! You shook me. What are you doing here, men? I came a while ago, end I've been waiting in the house for you to come beck. Your mother was in, end Linda came not so long ago. Why didn't you come in?"

"I dunno. I saw the car, end I knew yoa hed come to see me. I suppose yoa heard I hed come beck from Somerset West."

"Yes, I heard,—but not from you." There was a reproach in these woras. "Why sit out here in the dark . . .?"

"I jest didn' feel like coming in. It would be . . . it would be like being in the middle of a crowd, with everybody listening to your business."

So it had gone that far; already it had become something apart from his mother's business—and George sensed that Martin himself felt the wrongness of this parting. This boy was like the very air that feels the moving of all things, that warms with the moment's sun and chills with the clouds' coming.

"Anyway, I'm gled to see you again. Es I said, I came along to see how yoa were keeping."

"I'm oright."

"Let's sit in the car. It's getting a bit chilly out here." Almost before they had sat, each at either end of the broad front seat, George went on, for he knew that if he left any silence, they would be strained ones.

"Maybe I'm not entitled to ask, Martin, maybe I shouldn't in any case, but why did you leave Somerset West?" As he expected, Martin did not reply immediately.

"I don't think I know, any better than you do. But I couldn't stay."

"It was a pretty good job."

"Yet, it was oright."

"Somerset West is not a bed place."

"I suppose the desert is not a bed place—for lizards. Sorry, George, but . . ."

"Agh, all right. I suppose we got to leave it at that—it's just not the place for you. Mind you, Martin, I still can't find any excuse for you. Most people feel that they would be better off somewhere else, but they stay where they are. And I suppose they would say you don't know what's good for you. But . . ." He shrugged in the darkness. ". . . Who am I to say anything? I suppose there's a good reason somewhere—no, not a reason, not something you can work your tongue around, but some sort of . . . impulse." George was staring out of the window, talking partly to himself.

Martin did not say anything for a few moments, and there was only the darkness between them. "I'm sorry, George."

"Sorry for what? I begin to think that you don't have to say it to me."

"For your finding the job, and then my leaving it."

"Yes." George emitted a half snort that may have told of derision or disillusionment, or the irony of things. "I found the job. And that makes me the one to be sorry. It was my mistake. Now I know . . ." He turned toward Martin, as if to start on something fresh. "What are you doing now? Am I allowed to ask that?"

"I'm not doing anything much. There isn't much to do."

"Your mother said something about a men called Johnnie Peterson."

"Oh yes, Mama don' like Johnnie. She calls him a *skellum*. But he lives; he makes money. He gets along oright. End he doesn' ask what standard yoa reached et school, end then turn round end say, 'No, thenks, but we hev'n got a job jest now'." Martin paused, but he was unable to face George's continued silence. When he went on, it was both in defence and defiance. "We buy old clothes, end sell them again. There's plenty of scope for it—plenty of shops what will give you a profit. . . ." He tailed off, and was about to give up this unhappy encounter and leave, when George interrupted.

"But it doesn't make things any better, eh? You're still not very heppy about it!"

"Heppy?" Martin seemed to be considering the word. "Heppy or unheppy, I don' know. Is there no in-between?" He felt suddenly that he wanted to go on talking, asking questions and listening for the answers. For it was all a matter of questions the e days. Questions with no answers. There was only a fog of bewilderment instead of answers.

"No, there's no in-between." But as he said it George was not sure. It was a snap answer, and having made it he did not believe it. Martin, however, went on as if he expected his words to be thought over, to be worked out in both their minds.

"Hev I got to be one or the other? No in-between? Is Johnnie Peterson heppy? Is he unheppy? Does he hev to know—to feel one way or the other? Is it a thing yoa hev to be aware of, like being hungry? End so—what is heppiness?" He glanced up suddenly from the dark place at his feet. "There's a book—one yoa loaned to me a while ago. I remember one thing it says: 'A ruined house is not miserable.' End in the same place: 'A tree does not know it is miserable.' End it's the same now—like a thing with no mind of its own. Ask me—ask the trees—it's the same thing. Because I don' know!"

"But it's not the same, Martin, not the same at all. You take words out of their context and confuse them. It

wasn't your unhappiness that the fellow was talking about." George did not quite know how to say what he wished to say. He wished above all to keep them with their feet on the level ground, not to lose themselves in self-consciousness. But despite this he felt himself being pulled beyond his wishes to the fringe of deeper argument. "He meant the miserableness of being incapable of faith—of things that have no capacity for God."

"Oh, yah!" Martin's voice had bitterness and cynicism in it. "God is light—and I'm walking round not seeing where I'm going! But you say it's different. Maybe it's a different darkness. I don't know."

"You should have read some more, or remembered more. He was talking about faith. One way or the other, you hev to hev faith." It was too far now to turn back. George knew that it could not be left at this, that Martin would not leave it.

"Faith? . . ." Martin shook his head slowly in the dark. Oh, it was so difficult to explain the inadequacy of it. It was like an estuary leading out of a narrow land, and the narrow spit as a bar at its mouth, and the real ocean beyond; the bar where the timid halted, who sought the ocean but were made afraid at the sight of its endlessness where one must go alone. . . .

"Faith? What it is exactly I don't know!" It was George's turn to glance across earnestly. "But I know one thing. Sit end think of yourself, end nothing outside yourself—sit end stew in your own unhappiness without looking outside it, end you'll never find anything. I know one thing—there is a right order of things. Perhaps to believe that is happiness. But believe it or not, Martin, that's what the book was getting at. End he's right—Pascal. Martin, you got to take something on trust! Don't do it, end you hev a gap to fill. You hev Nothing—I know that's the fashion these days, end if you want to be fashionable, all right. You reason a gap in all existence, end then you go round searching with your reason for something to fill the gap you reasoned in the first place; but the gap is still there. . . ."

George stopped, and in the following silence he felt im-

potent, drained of all his persuasion. They had both felt the depths, but had fringed them, being too unsure. They were both floundering about the edge of truth, getting nowhere. He had been of no help. He was limp and disheartened, and was not even listening properly as Martin replied:

"If I don't trust nobody but myself, then I know where I am. I don't depend on anybody or anything that I'm not sure of. That's safer, because I stop expecting anything."

George shrugged to himself and sighed audibly. On the one side it was himself and words that had a hollow sound, and on the other side it was Johnnie Peterson and cynicism and the false new stimulation that would burn itself out: of being Martin Baart, nobody's puppet. This time again George was losing the fight. He had tried to redeem his failures, and his arguments had floundered in another failure. He gave it up.

"All right, I'll look round again, Martin. There's one possibility I know of—helping to work a cinema show out in the Flets, out Ottery way and past Plumstead. It wouldn't mean going away. I'll make more inquiries. I presume you would be interested?"

"Thanks, George. I'm not ungrateful for all the trouble you've taken—getting the job at Somerset West, and everything. I know how much trouble you've been heving." George heard Martin laugh softly in the darkness, but there was no humour in his voice when he continued: "P'haps I'll pay you a heck some day, when things hev changed and everyting is rosy. It's bound to come, eh?"

Martin opened the door, on the far side of the car, and slid out, shutting it gently behind him so as not to disturb the outside night. He paused only to put his head to the lowered window and murmur, "*Tot siens* George," and then he walked round the back of the car and across to the darkened cottage.

George sat a moment looking after him. He was glad to recall now the earlier part of this evening. How different they were, the sister and the brother—and the mother. The thought of tomorrow, and Linda, made George feel a little better as he drove away.

Only Martha was still up when Martin entered. Linda had gone to bed with tomorrow in her mind—the exhibition, and the painting, and she standing there among people like the Sauntys, being recognised and nodded at from behind. She had gone to sleep on this, in the small room that she would share tonight with Martha and Francis.

Martha came to the doorway of the kitchen as Martin entered. "Harro, Martin. We been waiting for yoa to come. Et least, Mr Darvel been here for a while, coming to see yoa. He been sitting wid Linda end me, waiting, but he's gorn not so long ago. He says maybe . . ."

" . . . I saw him, Mama. He was going out to his car when I came, end we been sitting outside . . ."

" . . . In de dark? End it's so cold outside?"

"No, in his car."

"Oh well, good. I'm gled yoa seen him end spoke wid him. Yoa been busy today?"

"Yah, quite busy. I cen give yoa some mon'ey . . ."

" . . . Agh, no, yoa don' hev to give anyt'ing . . ."

" . . . I must pay something, Mama. I been long enough without paying." His tone was harsher than necessary. Now, in these moments when he was alone with his mother, was not the time for softening. There must be no weakening, as the warm blood would have him weaken. His independence was still strange enough on him to make him gauche and hurtful in showing it.

She took the money—two pounds—without further objection, and picked up the lamp which she had set on the table. It shone up on to her face, on which there appeared for a fleeting moment in its sharp light a smile sad with her tolerant and understanding love.

"Thenk yoa, Martin. Good-night, eh. I hope yoa papa don' wake yoa w'en he's coming in. I put a blenket on de settee. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mama."

Martha opened the door of the bedroom gently and went through, leaving Martin with the light of one candle. This he snuffed. He slumped down on to the small settee, and removing only his shoes he lay back facing the dark ceiling,

sleepless for a long while. He was still awake when Joe fumbled his way through the door some time later, but he lay still and let his father go to bed ungreeted, hardly conscious of Martin among his own half-dreams.

. . . Why? . . . Why? . . . Why the dust on moths' wings? . . .

. . . It was among the hovels of the Flats that he saw her, in the bare, soiled spaces that lie between the fetid shacks of Windermere, where pigs and mangy dogs and men kept beastly company. In this unlovely place he paused in his shuffling, and looking up he saw her in the distance, and was amazed by her beauty.

She was emerging from a dark doorway, with the appearance of a visiting angel having entered to clean the place. She had a fair skin, and to him she was a person of such radiance as he had never seen, so that she diminished the surrounding ugliness until it ceased to exist for him. And as she stepped out into the open, even in the distance he saw her look up at him and seem to beckon him. He stood in awe, not daring to believe what he could see, possessed by a desire, as pure as it was strong, to go to her.

Then there was no mistaking her signal to him. After a moment's numbness he advanced slowly toward her, and as he came she glanced sideways at him, smiled openly and intimately, and turned away through the shanties that spread, now disregarded, around them. Her face he could not distinguish, only knowing it to be lovely beyond description; her form was nothing but an impression of grace. As she went, he quickened his pace, but as he hurried she remained the same distance from him, moving lightly over the ground. The hovels fell behind them, and they came among the wattle trees that spread tangled over the Flats, where she moved down a smooth path that wound through the thick growth, and as he lost sight of her he hurried more, wanting desperately to keep her in sight. When he caught sight of her again he renewed his speed, encouraged by her backward glance.

As he chased her the light faded, until she became only a white form caught brightly where the heightening moon penetrated the trees. Then he lost sight of her

again, and he came to a place where the path divided, and where she might have taken any one of three ways. The loose sand of the path showed no sign of her passing. He looked each way in despair, and as he searched about with a growing anguish, he became aware of figures standing among the trees, like grinning totems. They watched him and gave no help. He heard himself ask the way she had gone, and heard their only answer—a light, mocking laughter. He repeated his question, until it was an imploring, and their answer was the same. The laughter grew until it filled the place with the mad, ringing echoes of a dark and lofty vault, and drowned his own frantic voice. As he looked from one to the other, their faces stared back with wooden grins that uttered the laughter of derision. In his mounting frenzy he rushed at one of them. He lifted his arms to grasp the high shoulders and shake them, and then fell back aghast, for the thing crumbled to nothing, and the laughing grew louder, until the whole wood rang with it.

He turned and fled along one of the paths, with the laughter weiling through the trees behind him. Only as he raced forward in his blind pursuit did he recall that one of the faces had been Johnnie Peterson's.

He followed headlong where the path led him, full of terror that he might now have lost her. At length, after what seemed many hours, he came to a long, low building stuck among the tumbled sand dunes, where Coloured people were filing silently into a doorway, and he saw her among them, about to enter. He tried to rush forward to the door, but the people edged him aside and motioned over their shoulders to the back of the line. And slowly they all entered the place, he last of all. Slowly, and with anguish, he went forward with them into the crowded darkness, where in the gloom he peered about, and when his eyes were accustomed to it he saw her sitting at the front, among crude, untidy men who jostled and leered at her. And once again as he tried to approach her the others kept him back. He sat imprisoned by the crowd, having to watch as the thugs edged round her, drinking cheap liquor from bottles. And one of them again was Johnnie Peter-

son. When they tried to paw her she brushed their hands gently aside and remained untouched. All this happened while from somewhere at the back a projector threw moving pictures on to a dirty screen, and the people around him, interested only in the show, took no interest in her. He took his eyes from her for a moment to see what sort of place this was, and when he looked for her again she was gone, and the drunks were cackling between themselves and looking round for other, easier women.

With a new anguish he searched the place for her, but she had vanished. Recklessly he pushed his way through the crowd and found himself outside, where everything was quiet. He looked about, and just as he caught sight of her moving in the moonlight along a path that climbed over the highest sand dune, she turned to look back at him, with a gesture which sent him chasing forward after her. And from then it was a wild, glad chase. On the high dunes his feet were clogged in the sand, but as he struggled down the heavy slopes, she stayed her speed for him, then sped faster as he came to the hard paths among the wattle. They skirted vleis where water lay silver under the moon, and they raced past poor fenced allotments where no dogs noised their passing. Always she remained beyond his reach, looking back and beckoning him forward. He felt no anguish any longer, but only the joy of being her pursuer. Alone they shared the still night, the wildness of the white dunes like deserts, and the frog-croak of vleis lying in the hollows between. He knew it was their world, away from anywhere.

At length the tumbled country levelled away, and he approached a large expanse of water, as large as a lake, with the mountain in the distance beyond. The shores were as smooth as turf, and she was standing there, turned half toward him, waiting where the scarcely sloping ground met the level water. And faced suddenly with the meeting he stopped, unwilling to lose the joy of pursuing. She was too fair to be won by him. But she turned and raised her hand to him, and as he was drawn toward her, he saw that her beauty exceeded that of anything he had ever seen or known.

They came together, alone in their own world, and in their embrace was the height of all his anguish, the perfection of all his suffering and his joy. And with such perfection there must be an end. She took his hand and led him down the bed of the lake, which was the very slope of the world; and he went gladly. . . .

Chapter 10

It was a long morning for Linda, before George came to collect her. Throughout it she had fidgeted nervously about the house, unable to concentrate on anything she was doing, and even when George had called and they were on their way, she could not stop being restless and excited.

As the car turned into the Main Road, however, she was brought back to another reality by seeing Nellie Sapeika on the pavement, about to step from the kerb into the road. As she smiled at Nellie from the front seat of the car she was gratified to see her astonishment, and to watch it turn into an expression of cat-like envy. As they swept into the lane of traffic, leaving Nellie open-mouthed on the kerb, Linda glanced across to see if George had noticed, but if he had done so he gave no sign of it, for his eyes were on the road. After that Linda seemed to settle back more comfortably into the wide seat, waiting for the remainder of the afternoon's triumph.

At length, after the long drive, whose comfort and elegance she kept contrasting mentally with a bus-ride, they arrived in the city. George took the car higher up toward the streets below the Malay Quarter, where there was parking space, and from there they walked back into the centre of the city, where the tall, stark buildings stood over them like grey-visaged men—places that were harbouring wholesale merchants and stockbrokers and insurance agents and such men who make no concessions. And one of these places erred so far as to give up a part of one of its floors to the howling of Art.

Linda and George turned in through its high doors, into its panelled hall. Linda hardly noticed the busyness of the place; she had her attention fixed, with returned misgivings, on some spot in this great place where her own picture hung for anyone to see. That was the centre of her

thoughts. She was entering the place in her own right, with some special privilege that she wished were better known to all the people bustling around her.

With the air of being accustomed to move in such places, George Dalvel led her toward a short flight of stairs at the head of which was the lift. Involuntarily she hung back from such presumption, but he stood aside for her to go in front of him. The small light in the panel winked, and they both waited at one side as the doors opened and the occupants of the lift emerged with their own preoccupations. No sooner had this happened, and Linda and George were moving to enter, than somebody else came chattering up from behind and brushed their scented way into the lift. The doors slid shut on the sight and sound of three ladies, middle-aged, stout, and expensively upholstered, who had, it seemed, not noticed anyone else about. Linda and George were left standing.

Linda saw George's lips compress and his hands clench, but he said nothing. He looked at her, and when he spoke she sensed the apology in his voice.

"Shall we wait, or shall we walk up? It's only the second floor, Linda."

She nodded her agreement: it would prevent the chance of a repeated unpleasantness. So they climbed up to the second floor.

They had opened the exhibition that morning. The consuls and mayors and parliamentarians, and all who by invitation followed the Arts, had come and gone. There were some, like the ladies of the lift, who, being just beyond the fringes of eligibility for Private Openings, and being aware of the value of a first day's appearance, were still arriving in the afternoon. But even with these the occasion had already dropped to a quieter tone. The poster in the corridor pointing the way to the gallery on the second floor had already curled its edges a little. The air was hushed again after the morning's brilliance as Linda and George made their way to the doorway that held an open invitation.

As they came to the door and paused for a second before entering, there on the opposite wall of the gallery was the carcase of an ox, dissected to display a trail of yokes and

bent-back labourers. Confronted by it, Linda's doubts were redoubled, and her own simple expectations confounded. This sophistication sapped her courage, and if she had been alone she would now have turned and fled. But George took her arm and pushed her gently through the door. Just as they were inside, the three ladies walked out past them, still talking—in slightly lower and more sibilant voices—and wiggling their catalogues in each others' faces.

George bought a catalogue at the table near the door, and they turned to look around for Linda's picture.

The walls of the large room were hung with coarse, dun-coloured fabric, and the place was partitioned with screens covered with the same stuff. Among those pictures immediately in view was not the one they wanted, and they moved down the room, tacitly searching for the same thing. Linda was more self-conscious than ever.

Then they saw the picture on the end wall, not inconspicuously placed. As they approached it Linda unconsciously glanced through the corners of her eyes to see if they were observed. And now, even without approaching it, she was satisfied; having seen it with her own eyes, hanging for the public to see, she wanted to leave it. To stay now was even an embarrassment. But she could not communicate this to George, and she was forced to go near it with him. It was again—as it had been when she had seen it at Wintering—a slight disappointment to her, for it was not as she saw herself.

As a picture of someone it was striking enough, and George glanced to compare it with its original, but as a painting it was not in any way remarkable, and he knew it. But he could not say so.

"It's very good, Linda." He kept himself from saying aloud that with her it could not help being so; without distortion no painter could spoil her. Looking at it again, seeing it feature by feature, he began to feel a little uneasy about it, for his judgment began to see in it the signs of a too partial representation. It seemed that what the painter had taken away of truth he had added of his own mind: some interest in the girl as a rather sentimental ideal, some

picture intimate to himself, intimate between himself and the girl. The suspicion disturbed George. It made him feel a greater shyness toward this girl who was becoming a large part of his own thoughts, and it raised some vague barrier between them.

While waiting for George, Linda's attention moved away from the picture itself. It switched back to the girls at the factory, to the circle of which Nellie Sapeika was the centre. She was relishing the envy that they would feel if they could see this, and if they could see her here. If it could only be in the papers, for them to read about as they sat at lunch-time on the lawns at the factory.

She was recalled by George's voice beside her, and by the light pressure on her arm as he turned away. She was glad to be going, and she could now pretend to be interested in the other pictures. She tried to make her interest real; she wanted to enjoy the remainder of the afternoon, for she felt a sense of relief at having passed through some ordeal. But beyond one or two landscapes which she thought pretty, she was puzzled by what she saw. Coming for the second time before the strange-bowelled carcass of the ox, she could hardly restrain a giggle.

And as her attention wandered from the pictures it turned more to George Dalvel. He seemed to be so much at home in such a place, knowing by name and reputation so many of the painters, and apparently understanding what they meant. She noticed as well that now and then he would nod to some of the other people who came and went, none of whom were Coloured. She began to think more about him, and he seemed to fill out as a person in her mind.

They were standing in front of one of the pictures, having been round the gallery and being about to leave, when a hand was laid on George's shoulder from behind, and a man's voice addressed him with such warmth and such regardless volume that it caused other people around to turn and frown.

"Well, well! Good-afternoon to you! I haven't seen you for some time, Dalvel!"

They turned to see a man whose stature fitted his voice. Above a square jaw and high cheek-bones his eyes twinkled, belying the sternness of those lower features.

"Doctor de Wet!" George, being more careful of the conventions of such a place than the new-comer, kept his voice lower. "Good-afternoon, sir. We didn't notice you. I'm sorry. Doctor, this is Miss Linda Baart. . . ."

"I'm glad to meet you, Miss Baart. You two . . .?" He looked round the room and laughed softly. His voice had the soft guttural burr of the mountain country inland. "Look, these people seem to be looking at me as if they would like me to leave--spoiling their deep meditation. But I'm not finished yet. You finish your visit and I'll finish mine, and I'll see you at the door in a few minutes." He waved a huge hand to them and went off before another word could be said.

Linda and George whiled away the next few minutes looking at the pictures near the door, glancing now and then to see where the strange Dr de Wet was. When they saw him move nearer they walked out into the corridor to wait. When they were outside George whispered quickly to Linda:

"Don't be afraid of him, Linda. He's a good sort. He used to teach at the University when I was there, and he writes quite a lot. And he's been a Member of Parliament, for the Natives. He likes to seem fierce. . . ."—the grin with which George said this gave way to the earnest expression more habitual to him—" . . . but he's a good friend to us, to the Coloured people—in fact to almost everyone."

At that moment the doctor came out into the corridor and waved them on with a smile as he went toward the lift. "I don't know why people treat such a place like a morgue. You'd think there was some solemnity about painting." He stopped abruptly and looked at Linda. "Ah, yes! I thought I recognised that picture. Well, Miss Baart, he didn't do you justice." His smile was so full of friendliness and charm that Linda's shyness thawed before it. "Did you enjoy it, Miss Baart? It's quite interesting, isn't it? Gives you an idea how these people really see

their country; you can see it in their painting. Pity it's the same old crowd, though. I didn't see any new people."

They went down to street level in the lift, Dr de Wet standing aside and ushering them past him. When they came to the street entrance he stopped.

"Now then, where are you two going? I'd like you to come to my house and have tea with me. Yes? You're not going anywhere else? Good. My car is up near Kloof Street—this place gets more and more crowded every day, and I don't like having to drive half round the city to find a parking place, so I go up there first thing. So let's go."

"I hev my car her, Dr de Wet. It's up that way, too."

"Right. Then off we go."

They made their way through the thickening traffic, the huge figure of the doctor going recklessly, like an ice-breaker. All the way along he kept up his unflagging conversation: lamenting the encroachment of the skyscrapers into these old streets where pavements were still cobbled and balconies were still of wrought-iron; halting them at one point to extend his hand up toward the ridge of Signal Hill, which was just visible—"Those trees, straggling along toward Lion's Head against the light. Like a caravan of pilgrims, eh?"; dragging them into a dark little book-shop where nobody was visible and where, with the doctor's stentorian bellow, a little sparrow of a man emerged from the darkness, smiled as an old friend, and handed over a book which the doctor had left to be collected. Eventually they came to George's car.

"This is where you are, eh! Right! I'm just down the way. Now look, Dalvel; it takes me some time to get out of this place, particularly at this time of the day. So you go up on to De Waal Drive and make your own way to my house, will you? You know where it is—near the Fountain at Rondebosch. And if nobody is there, go in and wait for me. I'll come steadily on." And he turned down the street, leaving them under his orders.

They drove through these upper streets, skirting the main part of the city, past the old buildings of the University, and up on to the lap of the mountain. The city dropped back below them, reaching the broad palm of its

new foreshore into the bay, where ships at anchor were small in the distance, and Robben Island dotted the calm, far-glittering water. Beyond the bay, from Blaauwberg and the white northern shore, to Jonkershoek and the mountains over Paarl, the hinterland hazed into the afternoon sky. Behind them, along the ridge that Dr de Wet had pointed to, the trees, like a line of pilgrims, stood out in a sharper silhouette against the north, held in their pilgrimage. And above them rose the mountain in its grandeur.

They were going slowly over the highest point of the drive, where the mountains of Hottentot's Holland came into view, when a horn sounded behind them, and Dr de Wet raced past them, waving as he went. In a warm moment of assurance Linda felt that she could never be awkward, nor feel worthless, that there could be no mis-giving, with this friendly man, no matter how great he might be. They followed him down toward Rosebank, and on to Rondebosch, to his house, which was tucked in a steep valley among oaks, and instead of being intimidated by the thought of having to drink tea with him, she looked forward to it. Even as he ushered them into his room—it was obviously his by its signs of well-used comfort—his very genuine friendliness allayed any possible fears. He sat down opposite them, his long legs stretched out in front of him, and, reaching to the table beside him, he drew on to his lap a basin-sized ash-tray holding an unsavoury mess of pipes, matches, and tobacco. He seemed to fondle the pipes rather than fill them.

"I'm sorry that my wife is not in, but we can carry on without her. She likes to gossip with her friends in the afternoon." And hardly without pausing he went on: "Tell me, Dalvel—having just met in the presence of art—how is your friend, Roland: Henry Roland? I heard from him a few months ago. You know Henry Roland, Miss Baart?"

"No, Dr de Wet."

"Well, I've no doubt you'll meet him some day. I hope so. Mr Dalvel knows him well. You'll forgive my asking about him?"

Linda nodded shyly, and the doctor turned to George with eyebrows lifted.

"I heard from him a while ago, Doctor—a letter about two weeks ago. He's in Paris. It's not easy there, he says. There are so many people trying to learn. He hes to get all sorts of other work to keep him."

"Yes, it'll be difficult for him, and I hope that in the end it turns out to be worth it. Mi's Baart, Henry is a painter, a Coloured boy. He's a very fine painter, and we're looking forward to seeing something good come out of him, if he doesn't stay in Europe and get his bearings a little confused." He turned back to George. "Which, of course, is the danger, Dalvel. He can get too much of it, and we must get him back here when he's had some experience, but before he becomes as confused as many of the Europeans themselves seem to be these days. Europe is a confusing place today—that was my chief impression last year—no place, certainly, for getting things straightened out in your mind."

"He mentioned again how thankful he was for your help, Doctor." George turned to Linda. "Dr de Wet helped to collect funds for Henry to go overseas."

As if he had not heard, the doctor went on: "How does he find living there? How does he find the change of being among . . . different people?" He asked it quite naturally, with the right of a friend, and no one was embarrassed.

"He hasn't said much. He's met other Coloured people, though not from here. I presume it doesn't matter so much there."

"Anyway, it will be interesting to see how he has developed when he returns. But now, let's go and have some tea."

The doctor pulled his bulk from the chair and led them to the drawing-room, where the tea had already been laid.

In such company Linda became more content to sit back, inconspicuous, but enjoying the fascination of hearing George Dalvel and the doctor—mainly the doctor—talk of things that had never come within her experience and did not even now touch the core of her understanding.

It was not what they were saying that fascinated her; it was the sense of some hitherto unknown freedom which enclosed the place they sat in.

"They say there are no South Africans, Miss Baart. Unhappily that is too true, and it is a sad thing. And it is in the galleries that you see it, in the way the painters see things. There are exceptions, of course—Henry Roland was one. Most of us are trying so hard to persuade ourselves and all the world that we are good South Africans. We are full of self-consciousness about it—and full of conscience. Henry Roland, and people like him, are South Africans without being aware of it—by instinct." The doctor turned to George again. "That's why Henry is a good artist, Dalvel. He sees much of it with his heart. Because his heart is unquestioningly in this country he sees much of the truth. And of course there is a melancholy about him, a sort of awareness of chaos. Perhaps he has a right to be melancholy."

"I sometimes think that to send him away may not have been a wise thing. Among those people who *think* so much about themselves, he may himself become too self-conscious. And that may draw sincerity out of him, make him into a sort of caricaturist, apt to overdo things, to emphasise chaos. Either that, or it might draw all the fire out of him, make him cautious, which no artist can be. It will draw him away, to be an observer instead of a part of the country."

"Our biggest job is to keep from being alien people here—spectators. Because, like all new converts, we would then think that only in us are the real people. It's a paradox. We come to believe that we are the land, that it is us. And we start to make our country our little back-yard, and wish to hedge it around with our own jealousy."

Linda was aware, without any certainty or clarity, that what the doctor talked about was a subject that should raise an awkwardness between them. He was talking as a European, yet as a European he was, naturally and without any embarrassment, talking as if they were all the same and as if there were a freedom from all restraint between them. For Linda it was a situation to be wondered at, to

be stacked up with her days at Wintering and folded with them into the background of all her dreams.

For George such occasions were openings in the strands of custom that fenced the boundaries of their life.

Dr de Wet smiled in his ingenuous way. "Well, we've gone a long way, starting with the exhibition of the Art Group. But it all links up, yes? Art is a good mirror. In the meantime my tea is getting colder and colder, so let's have some more of it, fresh."

The pleasant interlude did not continue much longer. The genial doctor was due that evening at some meeting. They took leave of him, with an invitation from him to come again. As they drove away, Linda was left a little bewildered. It had been a remarkable few hours, a long stretch of new experience the like of which she had never even dreamed of before. It added in her mind to the turmoil which was already there: George Dalvel, Dr de Wet, the carcass of the ox, Nicholas Saunty, Nellie Sapeika, all muddled and each coming up clear for a moment from the welter of the others.

Chapter 11

NELLIE was with her court of cronies, walking in a gaggle down a street of fruit-shops and other small establishments, not far away from the street where the Eclipse Saloon stood. They straggled along the pavement, lengthening their line and shortening it, in the gutter and out of it, running and walking, according as the other people required room to pass. But Nellie was always in the centre, and Dora Fortune was always bringing up the rear.

Nellie was talking. "We got to wait till she's hev'ng a week-end orf—end me too. Yoa's working in de factory, end yoa cen get orf any time for de week-end, but I carn't. Nor cen Linda. So we got to hev it w'en we cen orl come." Nellie winked, and nodded back to Dora.

"But den we carn' get any'ing ready, becorse we don' ever know w'en she cen get a week-end orf." It was Daisy Martin who spoke, one of the other factory girls.

"Well den, we got to find out."

"W'y don' we yest arsk her, den? Or get Dora to." Fortuna Alberts, who said this, was the bright one of the bunch.

"We cen yest say to her, 'W'en cen yoa come to de beach?' "

"Nie, men! I don' t'ink it's a good idea. We don' want to go arsking her anyt'ing. Not me, anyway. But . . ." Nellie's pug face lit up with a new idea. "Yah, I got it! A better idea. We don' arsk her; we get Dora to arsk her w'en she's hev'ng a week-end orf." It was suddenly Nellie's inspiration, as if Fortuna had never mentioned it. And since Nellie was the leader, they all accepted it. Fortuna was a little hurt, but she let it pass.

Nellie went on: "We get Dora to tell Linda we got a big picnic on de beach by Muizenberg on de week-end—a big party of orl of us, like we used to hev before. Yoa remember de party we hev et Hout Bay t'ree or four weeks

ago? We get Dora to ask Linda please to come, because Dora is a good friend of Linda, and Linda will say yes if Dora ask her. But we got to find out soon."

Fortuna's more acute mind doubted the need for all this mystery. "I don' see w'at we making orl dis fuss about. Linda Baart got holidays yest like any of us, and dere's not'ing special about asking her to come for a picnic."

"But Nellie was hatching a plot, and no plot must be simple. All plots were devious and cunning, and Nellie was revelling in this one. She had never forgotten—nor would she ever forget—the sight of Linda riding in a car, smiling out at her with condescension—"like a bleddy medem, sitting in a big car. Yoa t'ink she was a queen."

She enjoyed so fiercely the contemplation of her lowering of Linda Baart's pride that she was jealous of its happening, of the event being shared. She coveted the triumph, and she would have liked to keep the thought of it entirely to herself.

But they had all learned of Linda's picture being painted, and now being shown in an exhibition in Cape Town. They had come together to join their several jealousies into a congenial cacophony of spite in which Nellie's was the loudest voice. Now they were scheming to lower Linda's pride, planning her humiliation, and at last, between them, they had thought of something. It was a simple plan, which Fortuna had suggested in the first place, and which Nellie had grasped at and made her own. It was a clumsy wickedness they had conjured up, simple but more grievous than they knew.

Dora did not know the others' plot, being only on the fringes of their confidence. She knew only that Linda was to come with them on this picnic, and it made her glad. Without Linda as a member of this crowd, Dora's own membership of it was precarious. But for Dora the company of others was a necessary part of life, and as Linda had drawn away into herself, into what others assumed to be a puffed-up pride, Dora was left to attach herself as best she could to the other girls, by whom she was tolerated because she was harmlessly good-natured. And now that Linda was to be asked to join them again, as

she had been used to do in the past, the prospect had brightened for Dora.

When Dora met Linda the next evening she used all her eagerness and persuasion.

"Oh, Linda, it *will* be a nice picnic! Dere's orl of us going—a big party. Some Scaturday arfternoon, w'enever yoa cen menage to have a week-end orf. End we going to stay over on the beach till Sunday. Yoa *must* say w'en yoa cen come, Linda, so w'ecen arrange it, Piet Krogmas and de udders is coming orlso." Dora's blunt brown face wrinkled as she pleaded.

Linda was at first a little suspicious of this consideration for her own convenience, particularly when Nellie Sapeika had anything to do with it. But Dora's mention of Piet allayed this suspicion, for Linda recalled the promise she had made that night of the fair, when Piet had asked her about a picnic on the beach. And she knew that it was something she could not avoid; there were still tenuous links between herself and the circle of her former friends—strands stretching out of the whole background of her life, out of the years when there had been no keen consciousness of her being different from them. She had promised Piet Krogmas, so now she was bound. And besides, the idea was not altogether unattractive to her; her imagination was caught by it, for she had some status now, with which to confront the other girls. They might be jealous of her, but they must also be impressed by her new prestige.

"We-ell, I don' really know, Dora. You see, I never . . ."

"Oh, but Linda, yoa yest *can't* say no, w'en dere's orl of us!"

"But I was asked a few days ago if I would perheps like to go for a ride in a car. . . ." The occasion was worth a little deception, and Dora's interest swung immediately on to this.

"Oh, yah, Nellie was saying she seen yoa riding in a car in de Main Road yest a couple of days ago. It must be nice, eh Linda?"

"Yah, it is, Dora." Linda contrived to look unimpressed.

"Det's de car w'at belong to de schoolmarster w'at's a friend of Martin, eh Linda? He must be a nice men—end clever, too, eh? He's de one w'at was getting a yob for Martin over in Somerset West."

Dora was, in her usual way, beginning to digress too much.

"Dora, w'en do yoa—I mean all the others—want to go on the picnic?"

"De picnic? Oh, yah. Well, dey was hoping sometime soon, but it's depending on yoa. Det's w'y I come to arsk yoa."

"We-ell, yoa see, Dora, Piet Krogmas hes already asked me to go on some picnic on the beach past Muizenberg. He arsked me some time ago, end he didn' say when exactly, but perhaps this is the same one."

Dora's mouth dropped open. She wondered if something had gone wrong, if perhaps she had made one of her mistakes.

"But none of de udder girls knows about dis, Linda! Et least dey didn' say anyt'ing. End Nellie didn' say anyt'ing about Piet knowing about de picnic." Dora gazed hard at Linda, for even she was aware how this would infuriate Nellie. Then she shrugged, as if the whole affair were beyond her. "Well, p'reps, arfter orl, dey been making de plans for de picnic for a long time, end dey on'y want to make sure now. Ev' anyway, Linda, it's oright for yoa? Yoa *can* come? Which week-end?"

With Dora's renewed pleading, Linda suddenly felt a close, warm friendship for this girl who had no wrong in her, no spite or jealousy.

"I got the week-end after the next one, Dora. I could go then."

"Oh, Linda! Det's wonderful! I'll tell Nellie. Linda, I'm sure we going to hev a lovely time!" And with this good news, Dora went off in high spirits.

On the Saturday morning of the picnic Linda packed her things into her bag half-heartedly. She had come down from Wintering a little earlier than usual on a

Saturday, because Mrs Saunty was away for the week-end and only Nicholas Saunty was home; but by now she had lost what enthusiasm she had felt with Dora. Since then there had been a reaction, and she would have preferred not to go to Muizenberg. It was too late now to say to the others that she was sorry, that she could not come, after all; and Dora would be disappointed. But now it would be a poor week-end—she felt already that it had been wasted.

After an early lunch Martha washed the dishes, while Linda packed a few more things for the all-night picnic: a sleeping-bag made from blankets sewn together, a packet of coffee, and a tin of milk—things which to Linda in her present mood were merely a dead weight. She packed the things listlessly, as if she had not even yet made up her mind about it, knowing in an indeterminate way that in the end she would have to go.

Martha looked up from the basin and turned her head to add her own last advice.

"De wedder is lovely, Linda. It looks es if yoa won' get no sou'-easter." Then she squinted, in her effort to appear monitory. "Yoa be careful, eh! I know—I been on lots of camps on de beach w'en I was a young girl before I merried Yoe Baart. End I know Piet Krogmas ain't no gentlemen." Then she shrugged. "Agh, but I s'pose it's oright. Yoa been on picnics yoaself be'fore, end so far dere ain't been anyt'ing terrible heppening." She shook her head. "But still, Linda, yoa still got to be careful. It's easy for young peoples to get in trouble. Yoa start heving a little bit of fun, end . . . poof!"

Martha said most of this to herself, for Linda, moving back and forth to the bag, was not really listening. When Martha had finished, Linda mumbled some assurance to her.

Early in the afternocn—for they waited every minute of this week-end—Piet Krogmas came to call for Linda, carrying on his back what baggage he would need for the afternoon and night. All the plans had been made, and the day was fine. They were to meet at the station, and would travel down to Muizenberg in one large party.

Above the cottages the mountain stood clear and serene, rising through the gardens of Kirstenbosch to the cool, dark depth of Skeleton Gorge and all the shadowed *krantzies* along the mountain's flank. There would be a moon that night, and each crag would have its shadow; the mountain-top would be a high, remote plateau of silence, with the reservoir set like a jewel there. It was almost enough to make them change their minds and spend the week-end up there. But the prospect from the south was just as inviting; the south-easter came softly from False Bay, leaving the mountains as far as Cape Hanklip blue-washed in the clean, warm air; the bay would be calm, and no wind would lift the sand from the dunes. It gave Linda a slightly better outlook on things. She and Piet took their leave of Martha and went off down the road together.

Piet was in high spirits. "Come on men, Linda, give me yoa beg to cerry. Carn't let a lady cerry her beg!"

But Linda, not yet completely won over to the full spirit of this excursion, was still a little frigid. "It's oright, Piet. Yoa got yoa own, end mine is not so heavy."

"Come on, men! Got, my beg's not'ing! End if yoars is not heavy, den orl de better, eh?" He laughed, took her bag with a flourish, and slung it over his free shoulder. After a short distance he continued his chat.

"It's bleddy nice; yoa coming wid us, Linda. Hevn' seen yoa for a long time, men—since . . . oh, yah, since de Luna Park et Wittebomme."

"I . . . I don' get away much, Piet, so it's not so easy. It's not es easy es when I was et the feactory. I don' get every week-end off, like I did then."

"But I hear yoa been wid a f'ellow wid a car, eh." Piet laughed at her, and winked, but he did not pursue the subject for the time being. "W'y d' yoa leave de feactory, Linda? De girls who is still working der, dey get every week-end end every evening es well. End de trouble is, wid dem it don' metter so much. Now . . ." He winked at her again. "Now if it was on'y yoa w'at hed more time!" For Piet, the game was on. There was a whole week-end to come, and he was going to make the best of it. "Yah,

it's a pity. Dese yobs working es maid in a house—even if it's a nice big place—is oright, but it makes t'ings hard for de boys, eh!"

In the past, when these things—flattery, and the attentions of boys like Piet—had mattered, since the age when they had begun to mean anything to Linda, Piet had been one of her chief admirers. And Linda had always enjoyed it. Martha was perhaps right—Piet was no gentleman; but his admiration was, if not constant, at any rate obvious. So Piet, being unaware of her initial coolness, persisted, and as the sun and the warm air conspired with him, Linda was gradually being tempted and won over.

Most of the others had already arrived at the station, and were grouped in one of the shelters toward the end of the platform, their baggage heaped on the bench. And just as Linda and Piet arrived, so did the last two of the party, Fortuna Alberts and Jannie Harmel. Everyone greeted and laughed at everyone else. Dora ran forward and met Linda with delight. Nellie eyed Piet and Linda venomously, and then turned to wink at the other girls; but they all kept their secret to themselves, and after the first sly communication that passed between them they covered the occasion with gaiety.

When she had heard that their invitation to Linda had been anticipated by Piet's, and now when she saw the two of them arriving together, Nellie was awfully angry; but now, after that first hating glance, she joined her exuberance with that of all the others, and the whole party seemed particularly eager to accept Linda as one of them again. Nellie contented herself with thinking that Linda would not be in possession long.

When the train arrived they all pushed together into one corner of the coach, and kept up their concerted gaiety all the way down to Muizenberg. As they issued in a noisy bunch from the station into the street that flanked the rocky corner of the bay, the lazy south-easter kept its promise of a good week-end. It came with a clean sea-smell, hardly lifting the surf. People were already lying like snakes in the sand piled behind the bathing-huts; but this part of the beach was not for the young Coloureds,

who, as they straggled past, nodded down at the inert brown figures with some derision but without real malice. They passed the pavilion, the promenade, and the beach huts, making for the open beach that stretched away along the shore, and lost itself in the distance long before it curled into the rocks at Gordon's Bay and turned down toward Hanklip. Coming round the end of the promenade they emerged on the sloping beach, and before going further they all removed their shoes, and the boys rolled up their trousers, and they continued, tripping one another, splashing through the shallow water, as gay as fools in a progress.

Piet ran up behind Jannie and tripped him into five or six inches of water, and they both tumbled. They sprang up, laughing and spluttering and dripping, and went running into deeper water. Everything was outwardly gay, while all the various chains of thought were strung out along the beach. . . .

. . . Maybe Jannie end me^a cen get away end find a decent place in de sand-dunes es soon es we got evert'ing fixed. . . . Nice shorts Fortuna got, end nice legs, end a nice . . . Yah, shorts make it easier. . . . Maybe it's going to be cold tonight, wid a wind, end a nice moonlight, better for getting togedder, Daisy end me. . . . Pity, Linda is a bit slow still. Got to get her worked up quite a bit for tonight, or else it's going to be a waste of time. But never mind, we got a lot of time to go still before it's dark. . . . I s'pose Linda Baart reckon she got Piet under her thumb yest now, becorse he goes end calls for her to come, end carries her beg. Oright, Linda, we see, w'en tonight comes! Yest wait end see. Maybe Piet will change his mind. . . . Oh, but it's a lovely arfternoon, wid Linda coming, end de sun shining, end everybody being so full of fun, end de sea flet like a table. I'in gled Linda come. . . .

They passed beyond the car park, which was already filling up, with family groups spilled out over the high, narrow beach. Away from the shore the dunes lifted in a warm, salty wilderness, and along the wave-lapped sand they met only an occasional couple walking arm-in-arm, or a tall spinster with a dog. There was no sound but their

own; the sea hardly murmured. After some distance, they came to where two boats were drawn up on the dry sand, and over the nearest dune there showed the tin roof of a small hut. A little way beyond this they turned away from the beach. Dropping their baggage in one of the sheltered hollows, they quickly sorted out and heaped together those articles which would be communal, and then they divided into two parties and went behind different dunes to change. In a few moments they were all on the beach again, Piet and Jannie having hung their soaking clothes over one of the boats. They had their own part of the sea, exclusive to themselves, and all the afternoon was now theirs.

It was a while later, when the afternoon was well drawn out, that they began to drift back to the hollow in the dunes. One of the boys who was there first began to make a fire between some stones which had been blackened on some previous occasion. They spread blankets, and sprawled about while the water was heating. When it was ready they roused themselves lazily, each of them producing some contribution to the picnic and placing it together with all the others in the middle. Phillip Anthony, a tall, sallow youth, gathered the bottles of beer brought by the boys and took them away to be stowed in wet sand, but the others lay back, leaving the rest of the work to the girls, stretching and yawning noisily, pretending to doze with manly indolence in the warm sun that could not brown their already-brown bodies. And while they ate and drank, the boy chaffed and threw innuendoes to the girls. It would soon be as dark as the moon would allow, and the day would begin to become more interesting.

It was Fortuna who started the game that the girls had planned to play with Linda.

"Yoa got a pictur w'at yoa marstei painted in an exhibition, eh Linda? I s'pose it must be nice, wid a men to paint yoa." Her smile was very sweet, an epitome of the girls' behaviour throughout the afternoon.

"Yoa get to be like w'at dey calls a model, eh Linda? Like w'at yoa see in de megezines." The observation came from Daisy Martin, with the same sweet look.

Fortuna made another move. "Yah, yoa don' get nice t'ings like det done for yoa et de factory. It must be nice to hev a marster w'at takes en interest in yoa. He's a nice man, eh Linda, taking lots of interest?"

Nellie joined in. It was more difficult for her to keep her feeling out of her face and voice. "Yah, once w'erc I was working in a house de marster was de same. De medem was big end fet, end not pretty any more, end de marster . . ."

It seemed to Fortuna that Nellie was moving too quickly, cutting too short the sport which Fortuna, with her quicker, subtler mind, wanted to keep up. Fortuna was enjoying the game too much to allow it to break down now in Nellie's crude fashion. She interjected, nodding at Daisy. ". . . Yah, Daisy, but w'en yoa get yoa picture takeri for a megezine yoa get a lot of money."

"Yoa seems to know a lot about it, eh Fortuna?"

"Well, I read about it men," Fortuna could not help feeling some impatience with the foolishness and dull-headedness so often shown by the other girls. "Dey sits for a long time, w'ile de men paints dem. He on'y paints yoa face, eh, Linda? Maybe de next time he gets yoa to lie on a nice big settee. . . ." Fortuna mouthed the words with a dreamy look in her eyes, savouring the words and the image. ". . . wid yoa feet up, end maybe wid a dress w'at . . ."

Till now the boys had sat back listening to it all, not quite knowing what was going on, and feeling a little embarrassed as a result. But with this remark of Fortuna's they suddenly entered the sport with a few whistles and cat-calls. And it allowed Nellie to come in again where she had been cut off.

"Yah, det's de idea. Det's how dey start de fun end games. On'y sometimes dey don' bodder to start off like det. Dey yest starts to give yoa little presents, like de marster in de place w'ere I was working, w'at I was telling about yest now. End den . . ."

Linda's eyes were glued on her tin mug, so that her face was hidden from them. She felt ensnared by their banter, from which the first pretence at sweetness had been jerked

away by this last speech of Nellie's. She wanted to get up and fling herself out of this circle of hate, but she lacked the courage. At Linda's side Piet fidgeted uneasily. Dora, from the other side of the fire, looked across at her with great brown eyes filled with misery; for now even she was aware of the spite and antagonism that hung over the party. She tried to help.

"Oh, Nellie, det's not nice! Nobody does t'ings like det, end it's wrong to say se'n t'ings."

Her sincerity made things worse. Nellie laughed. "Got, men, Dora, yoa don' know anyt'ing! Yoa s'pose everybody in de world is like angels. Yoa never seen the t'ings w'at I seen. I know w'at I'm talking about, men!"

Suddenly Linda emptied her mug of tea into the sand and leapt up. Flinging the mug toward her own bag, she ran up the near side of the dune and down into the blessed emptiness of the next hollow. All her senses burned in a confusion of anger and mortification. There was no help in thinking that they were all jealous. She was too aflame to think of anything; even her flight was a blank abandonment of all reason and direction. She fled where her stumbling feet led her, picking out no path. She felt no tug of the tangled grass, nor the clinging impediment of the hot sand. The dunes were a bright, blinding confusion. The skin burned tight on her cheeks. Behind her eyes was a dry bitterness, and the harshness of sand-paper, but no tears. From her chest to her legs flowed a sickly-sweet strengthlessness as she stumbled away along the beach.

The sea, reflecting the sky, was greying as the sun drained the brightness into the west behind the Muizenberg heights. The dunes threw shadows. The moon already showed its lustreless face as she followed the edge of the lifeless water. The afternoon was already too long, the week-end already drawn to an end like cold ashes. She came to where flat, wide channels straggled from a lagoon at the mouth of a canal that cut straight down through the Flats to the bay. She could not pass, and she sat on the higher sand, staring across toward the land's end at Hanklip. To turn back along the beach toward home? To sit here until dark? To go back to them? She could not

decide. But her inner longing was for home. The cottage would be in shadow among the trees now; there would be the heavy evening peace, and Martha. And the shadow would by now have moved up the hill from the river, up across the faces of the houses on the slopes of Mountain View, drawing blinds across their windowed eyes. And at Wintering there would be no lights on that side; for Amy would be in her kitchen, hoping to get finished soon, and Nicholas Saunty, if he were at home, would be sitting on the terrace in the dusk, drinking by himself. Between here and there was all the world of distance, from her wretchedness to the established calm there; from her too-nearness to the callous twist and snarl of human enmity, to the remoteness of Wintering, which was like another existence. The house would be empty but for him. If only she could be there, or . . . and that wild thought came up again . . . if only he could come here to this spot stretched away out of the reach of the girls' spite, where the sea darkened and no one spoiled its sympathy. But he would not come, and between this place and Wintering and home she knew that Nellie and all the others stood, that she would have to pass through them. And, dreading that, she did not move, but watched the dark bay's edge purled by the small waves' folding.

"Linda, men, w'at's de 'metter?" It was Piet. When she had rushed away, from the party there had been a moment's silence behind her, with the boys even more embarrassed than in the beginning, and Piet unable to make up his mind how to act. Then Daisy had giggled, and the other girls had followed her lead, except Dora, who had sat dismayed and undecided. When Phillip and Jannie had grinned and joined in the malice of the girls with a "Got, eh, Linda's getting bleddy touchy!" Dora had felt almost as bad as Linda herself. She had suddenly put down her mug and had risen to go after her friend, not knowing what she could do to help, but drawn by her sympathy. But Piet had caught hold of her and had held her back.

"O.K., Dora." He had winked at the others and nodded confidentially. "It's O.K., I'll fix it. We don'

want to spoil de party so soon, eh? Leave it to Piet." And feeling satisfied that he had covered his own line of retreat, he went off to follow Linda and see if he could keep himself in her favour.

Dora had sat down again and fiddled unhappily with a sandwich, while the rest of the party slowly broke up and wandered away to enjoy a swim before darkness fell. They went in the opposite direction from that in which Piet and Linda had gone.

As Piet approached her he worked up the proper lightness of manner. "W'at's de metter, Linda? Yoa don' want to worry for a little t'ing like d's. Dey on'y yoking, men."

She did not look round, nor in any way greet him. He came and sat beside her.

"Yah, men, dey on'y yoking. Yoa mustn' go end get med wid dem. Nellie end Fortuna is saying dey sorry, Linda. Dey arsk me to tell yoa, end dey saying for yoa please to come back. Dey didn' mean to be narsty."

She still gave no sign of reconciliation, so Piet slid his hand across to cover hers. He was encouraged when she did not move hers away.

"Yoa mustn' be cross, Linda. We got de whole week-end yet, end it's lovely here, eh? We going to hev a bright moon, so we cen hev a swim after we hev supper tonight. End we going to sit by de boat end dey a sing-song. Yoa don' want to worry any more, becoss, I'm telling yoa, de girls is sorry if dey hurt yoa. End Phillip end Jannie end Hannie says for yoa to come beck."

Piet was trying hard to retain the promise with which the afternoon had begun. His eagerness to do so became desperate, for he had held high hopes for this week-end, and it would be a little humiliating now to return to the others with a rebuff from Linda.

He rose and stood ready to pull Linda to her feet.

"Come on, let's go for a walk. We cen get over dis water end go along de beach. End don' worry, eh!"

She allowed herself to be pulled up, and she even managed a weak smile as they slid down the sand toward the firmer beach. It gave Piet some of his former self-assurance, and as they entered the shallow water-channels

he turned to wave to the others back along the beach. Leading the way, feeling with his feet for any sudden drop, he turned and laughed at her.

"It don' really metter if we get to a deep part, eh? We cen yest swim across. De water is anyway warmer den de sea is." He continued to talk, to avoid silence, and he kept it up as they negotiated the channels without trouble and continued beyond them along the flat beach. In the poor light the others became only faintly visible behind them. He kept a hold of her hand as they walked together over the hard sand.

"Mind yoa, Linda, dey got something to be yealous of—Nellie end de udders. Yoa looking pretty good today. On some girls shorts isn' oright, but on yoa . . ." He raised his eyebrows. "It's nice to get away from everybody."

"Yes." Misconstruing Linda's willingness to admit this, Piet was heartened, and noticing his expression, Linda was sorry she had said it. She was prepared to walk with Piet, but not to be cloyed by his close attentions.

"Yah, it's a long time since we been like dis, eh Linda? De udders is oright, but dey's a bit of a nuisance some-times. Let's sit by yar a little. It's going to be a nice night—nice end warm."

They sat facing the sea, the far edge of which had now become indistinguishable from the sky. She felt a little better now, and was half-persuaded to believe Piet when he said that they were all sorry, that they had meant no real harm. Being away from them, out of their range, she could be more responsive to the huge tranquillity of the bay, and if she could not bend to Piet's intentions as he hoped, she could at any rate tolerate him. She could tolerate his nearness, as they stopped and lay back on the sand, his one arm across her tensed belly and his other hand lightly smoothing her hair. She was aware in some way that this was the last chance, that if this evening failed, or if she failed the expectation of this evening, a part of her life would be finished. If today—this very day so near its end—were to test her further, and if the inner strings of her emotion, pulled tightly, were to snap, there would also snap the last connections with these boys and girls in

whose company she had grown up. And after that there was no assurance, no other source of friendship on which she could rely. For she knew no other company dependable and proved. If today she once stepped across the boundary of enduring, there would be no return; she would sink down into friendlessness. Today the girls envied her, but there might be a change--if she held on. There had been times when she had felt like this in the past, but they had been overcome. In their company she knew her place; outside it she was alone.

Piet intruded upon her uncertainty. "Yoa should stop de yob yoa got now, Linda. Go end work in de factory again. For one t'ing, de ilder girls will get used to yoa again--yoa wouldn' be so much of a stranger. But most of all, it gives yoa more time to yeaself et night. We could hev good times togedder."

She held back her own irritation, trying to conceal it from him; for this had been Piet's refrain all afternoon, repeated until now it grated on her raw nerves and made her turn against him. In his staunch, unthinking self-opinion he took her so for granted, ignorant of any of her feelings, and now she flinched from his almost comical clumsiness.

Piet's hand moved down over her ear, tickling its lobe, and then moved down to her neck. And he felt the unwillingness expressed in the slight wince of her head the other way. Her body did not move, but he felt it tense and unyielding against his fumbling hands. This penetrated even his self-esteem. In love-making Piet was not patient, and he showed his impatience now when he spoke.

"Linda, for God's sake! Yoa got yoa mind somew'ere else. Maybe on de kerel w'd a car--Darvel. It's not like yoa used to be."

Being aware of some slight rashness in the words, he laughed to redeem the intimacy which he had thought they were achieving. But for Linda his words extinguished like a cold draught the feeble warmth which she had begun to concede. Piet became not only unnecessary to her, but abhorrent. To lie here beside him meant to have to bear his love-making. She might just as well return and bear

the others, and let Piet go off with Nellie. He would get what he wanted from her, and Linda herself would get peace.

"Perheps we better get beck now, Piet. It's cold. End they will be cooking supper."

He answered her sullenly. "Yah, O.K. . . . Dere isn' much use staying here."

They rose, and Linda shivered with the chill of the evening. Piet led the way across the shallow mouth of the canal, this time not troubling to hold her hand and lead her. But the moon lit the way, and she was glad of the independence. They picked their way over the dunes toward the remainder of the party, but only Phillip Anthony was there, collecting some of their belongings which lay scattered about the site of their first fire. He looked up at their approach, and without greeting them he enlisted their help.

"Good! Yoa cen help cerry some of dese t'ings, Piet. We making supper over by de boat. It's getting cold, eh? Yoa better change so long, Linda."

In the hollow where the girls had left their clothes and bedding, Linda pondered as she dressed. It would be simple to pack her things into her bag and leave them now. But she was still thinking of it when Dora approached. Dora, with her eagerness and unsuspecting persuasiveness, made Linda put down her bag and go and join the others. Linda was touched by Dora's so obvious pleasure in seeing her, but as they approached the group sitting around the fire in the lee of the boat, she was even more thankful for the obscuring half-light. As she and Dora came round into sight of the boat, the others were laughing—at Piet, it seemed. And Piet was looking uncommonly ill-at-ease as he slouch'd in the sand very much nearer Nellie than he had kept during the afternoon. When they saw Linda and Dora, the laughter stopped suddenly and awkwardly, and Piet avoided looking at Linda. But Jannie waved to her, and shouted:

"Got, men, Linda yoa mustn' be so cruel to oud Piet here. Yoa got him all sulking, men!"

And they all laughed again, and Fortuna rose and beckoned to Linda.

"Come end sit, Linda."

Linda was surprised, for this was not as bad as she had expected. Perhaps, after all, Piet had been right, and they were sorry. She sat under the bows of the boat where Fortuna had beckoned her, and Dora sat beside her.

For a while they were all noisily occupied in the business of dividing the food, handing it out, and eating, behaving as one party again, all together in their enjoyment of the food and the atmosphere of a moonlight picnic, chaffing and arguing; except for Piet, who still sulked in a manner which made Linda glad that he was not sitting opposite her so that she would have had to avoid his eyes. Somewhere in the middle of it all she was only vaguely aware that Nellie was standing up and fumbling with something in the boat behind her.

Soon after Nellie had sat down again Linda became aware of the silence which suddenly settled on them. Daisy, on the opposite side of the fire, began to smirk, and to nudge Phillip. Then, apparently unable to contain herself any longer, she giggled, and nodded across at Dora.

"Dora, men, yoa carn't sit dere. De place is specially reserved, men. Look. Dora, carn't yoa read?"

She laughed aloud, and was suddenly joined by all the others. Dora turned, and on hearing her draw her breath, Linda turned as well. Looking up at the timbers of the boat, and seeing what was written there, she felt the flush of panic that comes with ridicule. Just above her head, plainly visible in the bright moonlight, had been chalked the words "Europeans only", and beneath them, crudely and hurriedly in brackets, "Ladies only". In the first moment Linda failed to understand. Then the significance came, and with it the bitter confusion, the torment of their blind malice. Their laughter crackled all around her. Like a lost voice came Dora's plaintive half-whisper from beside her, "Oh, Linda, I didn't know. I didn't know. Oh, Linda, I'm sorry!" It echoed hopelessly across the loneliness in which Linda struggled. She had become completely alone, had gone beyond the sharp fly-buzz-baiting of this crowd, into a great agony of loneliness. An hour ago she had felt this agony, and then had been brought back; but now she

was alone again, this time without hope, where there was only darkness.

She sprang to her feet with a desperate, impetuous vigour. She kicked over the plates set near her, and for the second time fled from the derision and humility these people pushed on her. More reckless than before, she ran down the sand toward the beach, out of the light of the fire into the grey light of the moon. She turned away behind the dark shape of the boat, so that they should not see her, and stumbled along the loose sand that bordered the tide-hardened shore-line.

Her direction was instinctively back toward Muizenberg, out of the grey anguish of the dunes and the night-calmed bay, toward the lights of all the houses. After a while she stopped, and slumped sobbing into the sand. There was suddenly nothing to flee to; away out of bitterness, toward no promise. From her feet the shore sloped away into the awful openness of the sea. She raised her head to let her bewildered eyes follow the emptiness of it. To walk now down the hard sand, where the surf would come and obliterate her steps, into the endless water, that would cover everything with a comforting oblivion. Her body would go down into the soft depths, and would be beyond answering any jealousy. The ocean extended its invitation to the end of the world.

But Lir da remained motionless. That other course held an unknown which was beyond her courage, a vast darkness where nothing was which could stand as a mark for her decision. She clung too much to the things which she knew, which established her own worth.

As she sat there a new resolution came. It may have lurked on the fringes of her thought before she saw it, but seeing it, she exulted in it, fiercely and recklessly, as if she were baring her body and offering it in defence. She rose, and was about to continue in the direction of the lights, when she remembered that she had only the clothes in which she had left home. She paused, then shrugged, then went on. She had her ticket; someone else—they could decide between them—could in good time return her other things to the cottage.

She could not help, just then, feeling sorry for Dora.

A few cars were still parked in the open space overlooking the beach, but no one lay in the cold sand. And, but for one or two couples walking there, the promenade was deserted, so that the heels of her sandals cracked too loudly on the concrete. Now, where the lights shone in the pavilion and in the houses and shops, she felt more secure, as if when she had left the hush of the long beach, and the ceaseless lap of the water, she had cut from behind her the humiliation, and was left with only her burning decision. She hurried past the pavilion, along the street running above the corner of the bay where they had come that afternoon.

Approaching the station subway in the shadow she heard a low whistle, and looked round to see some loungeer detach himself from the wall and come toward her. She broke into a run, down the steps and along the cold dank subway toward the far exit. As she came to the far steps she looked round. The man was not following her; he had taken her for easy game, and was prepared to forget her. On the station platform she kept to the dark shadows, to avoid any similar encounters. But she had not long to wait for the next train, and when it drew in she looked for the most crowded and well-lit carriage, and sat among families returning from their day spent among the rocks beyond Seaforth. She travelled with her feet to the window, and they left her to herself, isolated but secure among them. They secured her from molestation, but in her isolation from them she had only her own mastering purpose to allay the more normal doubts that strayed into her mind as the train took her nearer Wintering. And her purpose, and its justification which kept drumming in her ears, over and over, was that she was right . . . she was right . . . her purpose was right. To go to Nicholas Saunty was her right deserved out of humiliation, and her right because he had made it so one night when he had touched her neck. Her mind clung to this.

Leaving the train and the station, she hurried through the crowded part of the suburb, which was full of the activity of Saturday night, across the Main Road with its

throng, and into the dark, quiet streets. There she heard again the loud crack of her own sandals, and, stopping to take them off, she then carried them in her hand as she hurried on, as quiet as the streets themselves.

When she came to the courtyard of Wintering she hesitated. No lights shone on this side, excepting that in the hall. But he was there—he must be. Walking round the side of the house, on to the terrace facing the mountain, she looked up, and saw the light in his study.

. . . On the beach Nellie would by now have fastened on to Piet, and he would have gone off with her into some sheltered hollow in the sand. She would be easy to take, among the dunes. . . .

After glancing up again to reassure herself, Linda returned to the courtyard and crossed toward her own room. Having entered it, she shut the door behind her and stood a while with her back to it, trembling.

Nicholas Saunty was a man who did not shun solitude, a man of a certain conceit, to whom his own company was often more satisfying than that of others, a man whose own mind could often provide the response to its own opinions both of himself and of the society in which he lived. He had, moreover, an inclination toward independence, the strength of which varied with his moods. And it was when this inclination was stronger that he would think of Linda Baart, lingering over the picture of her beauty.

Tonight he was alone in the empty house, cut off from any intrusion; at times like this there were no obligations, no other people to put a frame around one's thoughts and behaviour. The isolation and the independence were absolute; the four walls kept out the world. In such isolation there was a quality of sensuousness, like rubbing softly against the patient feet of eternity.

Behind him the door opened quietly, and Linda stood there, slim in her clean, crisp, grey-blue uniform. She had shed the clothes she had worn on the beach, and with them the sand, and the bitter defiance, and the proud look that was sometimes so strong in her. She stood in the dim

light by the door, with the look of a sad child beseeching, wearied with the consuming anguish of anger, submissive to his own longing.

Saunty looked round when he heard the door close gently behind her. He saw her standing there with her back to the door, her head inclined forward a little, and her eyes intimate as a child's. She did not explain her appearance, yet he knew why she had come. She did not doubt her right to come, and he admitted it.

He lowered the book which he had in his hand, but he did not rise. He smiled at her, as if he had expected her.

"Good evening, Linda. Your . . . week-end . . . you're not . . .?"

For a moment she lost courage, dreading that in his next words he would thank her for bothering to come, but that there was no need to remain.

"I . . . came back again, mister. My mother has gone to stay with her sister, and there is no one at home, so I came back. And I thought . . ."

"You're very kind, Linda. * don't think I needed anything." He in turn feared suddenly that she might turn to go. And despite his underlying uneasiness—challenging it, even—he committed himself further, to keep her there. For this must be the testing time; his half-conscious designs had hatched long enough. By then, on that very account, because now they had reached the very razor's edge of their relationship, he had not the courage to suddenly move from diffidence to boldness.

"It was kind of you to come, but I don't think I rang"—no, it would be unfair to say that, for it would pass the opening move to her.

"Come in, Linda. You're alone tonight? Amy's gone? It was kind of you to come back. I'm afraid that I forgot no one was in. I was going to listen to some music for a short while. Do come in and sit down."

He rose and drew the other large chair into the light of the solitary lamp. He stood waiting, while she came forward slowly. As she passed in front of his chair he put his hands on her shoulders. Her eyes met his. Then his own

eyes clouded with uncertainty, and he dropped his arms, and turned away abruptly.

"I'll get some music." He forced lightness into his voice.

He would not admit that he was afraid, for his sudden fear was not of sinning, but of going beyond the barrier. It was the barrier which he had always scorned to himself, and which now confronted him with its challenge. He motioned to her to sit. He must allow himself time, to sit and draw courage. In the meanwhile they could . . . they could drink together, to each other; this could be the first step in their intimacy. And at the prospect he was able to smile to himself. This very transgression alone—how it would astonish the prudent! He recovered some of his assurance with the thought.

"But first, Linda, a drink for you. No, don't get up, I'll get it."

She was sitting on the edge of the chair. In the train, keeping Wintering before her eyes, she had seen nothing beyond her arriving and his being here. Beyond that she had not dared to look. And now his caution was unnerving her.

"What will you have, Linda?"

"I don't . . . know, master."

"Then a gin, with vermouth."—Commonplace, like a cocktail party and dry martinis on a salver. As she looked up he saw the uncertainty in her eyes, and the loveliness of her face, foreshortened from this angle and rounded into the curve of her neck, and the loveliness of her neck so unbelievably soft that his hand hung a moment, wanting to go down to touch and prove it.

But instead he turned away and walked across the room to get her a drink. His own hand shook as he poured one for her and one for himself. When he turned toward her again and walked across, with his whole body fluttering with his emotion, she continued to wait on the edge of her chair. He put the glass down on the table beside her.

When she looked up, so that the white of her teeth just showed between her lips that were slightly parted, he could not hold his hand back from her cheek.

He felt her tremble, and her head lean slightly to hold his hand with her chin. He saw where the front on her uniform hung forward a little and the smooth flesh folded into a deeper tawinness and began to lift to her breasts. He moved his hand gently over her eyelids and along the line of her hair. At that moment, when he knew, like a man drowning, that all his command and dispassion were breaking under the ache of his longing, he knew, too, that he was afraid. There was a barrier between them.

He longed most to lift her to him and to move not his fingers but his lips over her eyes, to bave and feel the loveliness of her body. As his fingers moved through her hair she had the clean scent of the sea. And he felt the flooding, desolating sense of his tameness.

When she lifted her head to look at him, he turned his eyes away, and when, taking courage to meet her gaze, he saw there her bewilderment, like a child's, he shuddered and turned away. The moment had been lost.

Then she, too, understood, with a breaking of pain, and she was thrown back into her anguish. But now there was no way of triumph or solace, only his final rejection and her own withered defiance. Nellie and the others had mocked her; Nicholas Saunty had failed her. When she dropped her head into the cup of her hands and sobbed, he stood inactive, as if bemused.

He stretched his hands toward her, but dropped them. It was futile. All his conduct was futile. He himself was unsubstantial: a half-way, make-believe nonconformist.

Suddenly Linth rose, and without stopping to look at him, she fled out of the lamplight toward the shadows by the door. Before he could turn she had disappeared on to the landing outside. The lighted wooden faces mocked her stumbling descent of the stairs, and the cold house echoed her desolation. When she reached her own room it was no refuge, being filled with her own misery. She lay prostrate on the bed, utterly lonely in a huge unhappy wilderness. And she wanted at that moment never to go out among people again, never to be taken out of her loneliness.

After a long time Linda rose and walked listlessly round the room, gathering her belongings into her case, leaving her uniforms hanging in the wardrobe. There was a snapshot held in the corner of her mirror; it had been taken on some previous picnic, and it showed herself and Piet standing arm-in-arm on a rock, Piet looking very gallant. She ripped the picture from its place and tore it into little bits.

By now it was quite late. She had not moved for a long time, while the cheap clock on her dressing-table had ticked the passing minutes against her unnoticing ears. Eventually she had turned over and risen to her feet. Though during that time there had been no conscious decision forming in her mind, she knew that she was going to leave, immediately and finally. From now on Wintering would be a constant humiliation if she stayed, for in Nicholas's presence she would have to avert her eyes, and with Mrs Saunty she would be too aware of her own guilt. And it was only now, with this thought, that she realised that she had never in all the evening taken Mrs Saunty into account.

There would be no need to leave any explanation for her sudden departure, for he would know. Mrs Saunty, perhaps, when she discovered that young Linda Baart had gone suddenly, without any warning, and was not returning, would purse her lips and sigh, and to herself would curse all Coloured maids for ingrates. If she did think that way it would, at any rate, allay any other suspicions which she might have had. Linda wanted to let them know without any delay that she was not returning, so that, for one thing, they might send her wags to the cottage. So it was to Amy that she pencilled the note, briefly, purposely expressing contrition at her sudden and unexplained going, apologising for the inconvenience, and thanking Amy for her friendliness. She pushed the note under Amy's door, and left.

As she turned into the avenue, her case was already heavy; she was exhausted physically and mentally, with a weariness which had been resisted until now only with the nervous fire that had itself now petered out. She stopped

many times to rest on her way down the avenues toward the valley, sitting crumpled on her suitcase at the dark edges of the road.

As she was crossing the bridge, someone overtook her. The footsteps were neither perfectly distinct nor perfectly regular. It was Joe Baant, returning from the day's good companionship. All afternoon they had been lying on the rocks beyond Fish Hock, motionlessly baking in the sun, and even having a little luck with the fish—they had sold three fish to a vicar who had taken compassion upon them. They had finished up in a non-European bar in Muizenberg, leaving with just enough money to pay the train-fare home.

Slowly though Joe walked, Linda was slower, weighed down with her case, and Joe drew level with her. In the darkness he did not at first recognise her.

"Harro, *meisie*. Led me take yoa suitcase, men! yoa live far from yar, eh?" He stopped and peered more closely at her, focusing hard. "Got, Linda! Well, well, dis is a surprise, men! Yoa mam was delling me yoa been going for a gemp by Muizenberg. Funny, eh, I been do Muizenberg doday doo, bud nod on de beach. . . ." He shook his head seriously and spat with relish. ". . . Any-way, led me dake yoa beg, Linda."

Linda was greatly relieved when he did so. He swayed a little as he bent down to take the case, but having grasped it he carried it easily.

"W'ad's de idea, Linda? Yoa didn' go for de gemp, arfder all?"

Linda did not wish to talk of it, but it was necessary to give an answer. "I went, Papa, but . . . but I got a bit sick, so I came back."

Joe walked on in silence for a few moments, before speaking again. "Bud, den, w'y . . . ?" He let his question die away uncompleted, for it was all too difficult to understand just now. Muizenberg seemed a long way off, so far away that it made him tired to think of it. It had been a long way for Linda to come back all alone. And this case? It was very heavy to take on a camping party. But, no doubt, it was all right, if you felt awake enough to think

about it. And if it was not, it would not help to think about it too much in any case. So Joe asked no more, and Linda was thankful. Her need above all at the moment was to be able to relax and expend all the unhappiness in her. And it was Martha who stood in her mind. On to Martha's broad and liberal heart she knew instinctively that she could unburden her own—or part of it, that part which did not carry the load of the last hour or so.

When they reached the cottage, and Joe had gone off like a good child to his bed, Linda told her mother of the things that had happened during the evening, up to the point where she had left the others on the beach. Martha, sitting back mending clothes in the light of the oil lamp, seemed to draw out of her daughter the sharpest pain of that experience. So eagerly did Linda wish to get rid of her feelings that she came near to sobbing out the whole story. But that she could not face. Nor could she help fearing that her mother would want to know why she had returned home with all her belongings. She hoped desperately that somehow Martha would avoid what she herself wanted to avoid.

At length Martha spoke. "Well, Linda, you know w'at a nasty, ycalous little bitch Nellie Sapeika orlways been. You don' hev anyt'ing more to do wid her end her frien's! Dey's orl ycalous—end Piet Krogmas is no good anyway. Good riddance, Linda; end don' you worry any more." Then followed a pause, and Linda's heart sank when her mother continued: "But Linda, men, I don' unnerstend w'y you come home from' Mister Saunty's house wid orl you t'ings. You finished dere?"

Linda did not reply for a second. "It's w'at makes everyone so ycalous, Mama—thet I'in working et sech a place." It sounded unconvincing, and she hastily sought some other explanation. "End anyway, lately, Mama, Missus Saunty he's bren funny. She's been so cross, even w'en I hev'n' done noth'ing wrong. She's different from how she was before." She felt ashamed, but it was all she could think of. "I don' want to go beck, Mama! I cen find another place to work!" The plea was almost desperate. "But first, Mama, cen I stay et home for a little bit? Oh,

Mama, sometime it looks like I'm all alone!" There was more feeling in this than she herself had intended.

An idea had come into Martha's mind as she listened. To tell an untruth might not be good—Martha agreed with the principle. But sometimes it did good to stretch the truth a little, or even go against it, particularly if it were meant well.

"Oright, Linda. Yoa cen maybe help in de house for a few days before you get enudder yob. I got to go out to help Mrs Borrow a couple of days nex' week." She paused, and her next words were spoken nonchalantly. "Dis arfternoon Mr Darvel a George—come to de house to arsk if yoa like to go for a ride in his car. He was very disappointed. I said maybe he could come again. and he said yes, he would like to."

Just a little untruth . . . and Martha felt that for most of it she would probably turn out not to be wrong

Chapter 12

"BAART, it's de same kind of clothes yoa been selling to de second-hend places. Yoa been doing it wid us for quite a long time now."

"Yah, but I didn' know . . ."

Johnnie interrupted Martin impatiently:

"*Got*, men! 't's no good yoa trying to say anyt'ing like det to anybody else. . . . 'Yah, but please, consta-able, I didn't steal it. I didn' know w'ere de clothes come from. It's on'y Yohnnie Peterson w'at bring dem to me end tell me to sell dem.' . . . Try to tell de bleddy p'lice det! Even if yoa was innocent es a baby, dese barstards greb yoa for de benefit of de doubt."

Johnnie grinned good-humouredly, but Martin did not respond, for he had come to know Johnnie's grin. Both the grin and the good humour behind it were misleading. While both, as far as Johnnie was concerned, were genuine, both, as far as they should be indications of a state of things, were inappropriate, for Johnnie showed good humour when the situation contained no cause for it. Johnnie grinned as if the lines of a grin seemed to fit easiest into the composition of his features. Very seldom did the good humour give way and allow the fiercer emotions through, which underlay Johnnie's real attitude to life. There had been that one occasion when Martin had met him on the afternoon when he returned from Somerset West, but since then Johnnie's composure had been unbroken.

Martin knew that while Johnnie grinned now he was enjoying a kind of black-mail, ruthlessly, yet innocently. He was setting out the situation without any guile or malice, feeling no ill against Martin. He was putting the case as it was—you go about working with people who live by stealing odd things here and there, and selling them to junk-merchants and second-hand dealers, and you can't

expect not to be caught up with them. You can't argue that you were innocent, that you knew nothing about the other side of the business, for people are cynics, and the police aren't paid to be sympathetic. And if you don't ask about the other side of the business, you can't expect to be told. It's up to you. You have to look after yourself in this world.

Nor did Johnnie have any tenderness for Martin. It was the same argument; tenderness was weakness, and one could not afford to be weak. There could be no softening of the tough skin, nor the admission that perhaps there should be some sympathy for those less resolute than oneself, that one should not force anyone to do things which he is miserable in doing. If such sympathy had by chance occurred to Johnnie or Skaap Voister they would have raised their eyebrows, shrugged their loose shoulders, and rejected it—"Take it or leave it--and maybe you got to take it." They had the terrible, simple inflexibility of violent men.

"Come on men, Baart! Yoa's a clever *kerel* in a way, wid books end dese things. But in some ways yoa's a bit of a bleddy *domkop*!"

And Martin knew that Johnnie was right. Miserably, as he watched this new, compassionless world spread out around him, he knew it. Once there had been talk of faith. In whom? In Johnnie Peterzon and his kind? But it was not Johnnie's fault, and there was no good in putting the blame on his shoulders. In oneself? But where was the good in oneself? You have to look outside yourself, but that was like looking into a grey storm hanging over an endless black ocean, searching for a light of landfall. The storm and the ocean were too vast, too frightening because they were so inestimably vast. They raised the dread of an immersion in a complete loneliness. It was better to shut them out, and huddle closer in one's cabin of poor comfort.

"O.K., Baart, yoa take dese houses det way, end I take dese by yar. We meet again down de bottom of de street.

End look heppy, men, not so bleddy miserable. Nobody's going to buy fruit from a mug like yoa got yest now. O.K." Saying this, Johnnie turned toward his side of the street and entered the first gate with the two baskets of fruit on his arms.

He and Martin were in the neighbourhood above Main Road, where the substantial houses sat in their fairly small but well-hedged and foliaged plots. Each house was a little withdrawn from the road, and the road itself was quiet—the sort of road that Johnnie always chose for hawking fruit and flowers. Martin would in any case have disliked this business of going from house to house, standing at the back door until someone came and, as often as not, turned him away. But this distaste became something stronger and abhorrent because he knew the purpose behind the business. Hawking gave access to people's property, and once Johnnie came within reach of detachable things he made the most of his opportunities. Martin was expected to do the same.

Now, being left alone to cover his own territory, Martin went slowly down the road, from house to house, keeping strictly to the legitimate pursuit of selling fruit, avoiding all suspicion. Some minutes later he emerged from the last gate, relieved that so far he had been able to avoid compromising himself. He waited under a tree at the kerbside, knowing that Johnnie's progress would be much slower and more calculating. After a moment he saw Johnnie come out of one gate two houses up, and go into the gate of the next house, walking with his usual arrogant swing, the baskets swinging with him, and the loose, baggy coat which he wore flopping about his legs. Johnnie nodded and grinned at Martin as he disappeared.

Eventually he came out of the last gate and crossed the road toward Martin.

"O.K., Baart? Finished?" He looked down at the baskets, and nodded his approval. "Got, yoa done quite good, ch! Yoa getting de art." Then he turned toward the end of the road, and beckoned Martin to follow.

They turned into Wilks Road, where there were houses only on one side, facing an open space where pine trees

grew. These houses were larger, and their gardens more spacious. Johnnie stopped opposite the first gate.

"I s'pose we may es well try dese places on our way home, ch Baart? Maybe we cen get rid of de whole lot. End we may es vell go togedder—so come on." Johnnie picked up his baskets again and led the way up the drive.

At the first two houses they sold nothing. The third house was smaller than the other two, more of a cottage, with an open *stoep* and a thatched roof. They saw no path leading round to the back, so, after pausing momentarily, Johnnie led the way to the front door, which was slightly ajar. Martin stood in the drive as Johnnie climbed the low steps, put his baskets down on the *stoep*, and then pressed the doorbell. The bell rang just inside, but no one came. As they stood waiting they could see into what seemed to be a small hall-way, and Johnnie, quite unabashed, peered more closely inside. Then he gave another short ring, and they waited again. Then, as Martin was about to stoop to pick up his baskets, he saw Johnnie look quickly toward the sides of the house, step forward through the doorway into the hall, snatch something that lay on a table inside, and step back on to the *stoep* all in a flash. And with the same speed Johnnie pushed the thing down under the fruit in his basket, turned, and stepped down into the drive.

"Come on! Not'ing doing here."

As he whispered this he hurried down the drive and out into the road again, with Martin coming quickly after him. In the road Johnnie turned in their original direction and proceeded at a more collected saunter, but he did not stop or slow down until they had gone two blocks and were coming out into Main Road. It had happened so quickly that Martin hardly realised what really had happened, and Johnnie had moved ahead of him so rapidly that he had been unable to confirm what he wished he had not seen. Eventually, as Johnnie stopped on the pavement in the Main Road, Martin caught him up and blurted out:

"What . . . ?"

" . . . Never mind, Baart. We see w'en we get beck. Let's get beck to de shed."

And Johnnie did not venture anything else as they made their way to their base—a shed in the back-yard of a dingy house in one of the streets below the railway line, a house occupied by a man whom Johnnie had introduced as “My uncle, but it don’ metter. He’s a bleddy crook, so he don’ mind if we use his shed.”

Skaap Vorster, thin, wiry, looking older than his twenty years, was sitting in a warm spot sheltered from the wind, reading a paper-backed book. Johnnie greeted him airily.

“Well, Skaap. Bus, eh!”

Skaap looked up indolently and nodded. As they passed him and entered the shed he rose and followed them. When they were all inside Johnnie removed the fruit from the one basket and picked out a handbag. He flourished it in front of Skaap’s face before opening it.

“Dis one was too easy, Skaap. Not so, Baart?” Johnnie grinned across at Martin as he snapped back the catch of the bag and put his hand inside. “Yoa orlways get a kick from opening a woman’s bag, eh Skaap? Yoa never know what nice t’ings yoa going to find. Ya—ah! Dis is maybe not very romantic, but it’s w’at we working for . . .” Johnnie was holding up five one-pound notes. “Not a bed afternoón, eh?”

He turned the rest of the contents out on to a box. There was a lipstick, a handkerchief, and a few other things, none of which were of any use, so Johnnie pushed them back into the bag and threw it into a corner behind a pile of wood. Then he turned and winked at Martin.

“Oh yah. Somet’ing else.”

He pulled off the baggy coat, and from the inside pockets he took a fine woollen jersey and a dress, both rolled up. From inside the shirt he drew another dress and a silk shirt, and finally he held up a brassière of fine white lace.

“I bring dis too—yešt for luck.” He held the brassière up in front of him and rolled his eyes. “Snappy, eh? Yoa got to hev somet’ing to get inside dis. Yoa cen hev it, Skaap. Give some woman a present like det, end yoa sure to get a good time out of her.”

Skaap caught it as Johnnie threw it to him, but he

looked at it, sneered, and dropped it as he turned toward the door to go and sit in the sun again.

Jolunnic turned to Martin. "Well, not a bed yob, eh? More business for de firm. I reckon we get a couple of quid for dese. Yoa see, Baart. It's easy, men. Nex' time yoa try it yoaSELF. End yoa don' hev to worry about dese barstards—dey got plenty of money. Look at dese clothes—end dey prob'ly don' miss dem. End dese yar . . ." He picked up the brassière again and smoothed it as if it were a kitten. ". . . Rich fits, eh—lily-w'ite!" He cackled. "It's orl for de sake of de firm, Baart. We got to live like anyone else. End wid us de wages is good, eh!"

And Martin could not deny that. Last week they had picked forty pounds from the pocket of a tot-double winner in the crowd at Kenilworth race-track, and had been a mile away by the time the hullabaloo had been raised.

For the past few weeks George Dalvel had been busy on Martin's behalf. He had spoken to many people, Coloured and European. He had been given half-promises and semi-assurances of work, and had answered many advertisements picked from the newspapers. But nothing had come of it.

Finally George turned to Dr de Wet, with more hope but with some reluctance, for he did not want to tax the doctor's time and kindness.

He was shown into the same comfortable room where he had come previously with Linda, and he had been waiting only a moment when the doctor appeared.

"Good morning, Dalvel! Lovely morning, eh!" With this greeting he led George indoors and through to his study. When they had seated themselves the doctor came to the point immediately.

"So it's about your young friend. I've been thinking about it since you 'phoned me, Dalvel. And I went so far as to mention it to one of the Committee of the Association—Mrs Hoare, I don't know whether you know her. As you probably know, they're getting on with their Centre

out at Lansdowne, and it does seem that they'll be able to use an intelligent young fellow, chiefly for clerical work, but also with their mobile cinema. I think I mentioned it to you before. 'You were telling me that young . . .?'"

"Baart, Doctor. Martin Baart."

"You mentioned that you thought that some work where he could use his head would be ideal. What do you think of this idea?"

"It sounds very good, Doctor. "I admit that I feel a little ashamed to trouble you like this. But I've spoken with quite a number of people, and I haven't been able to get far. And then when I spoke to you the other day, and asked if you could help, I felt as if I were passing my responsibility on to you."

"You feel you have a responsibility for the boy?"

"Well . . . he was in my class at the school. And I know his mother . . . and his sister." George flushed a little.

"The girl I met with you that day when we had tea together?" But there was no need for George to answer.

"A very charming girl. And therefore, in one respect, a very pleasant responsibility." There was nothing coy or artful about Dr de Wet's grin. "And Martin himself—you say he's an intelligent lad, Dalvel."

"He's got a good mind—just the sort, in fact, that shouldn't leave itself stopped half-way. It's a little difficult to explain, but he should really not have to stop studying, because he absorbs things so that they . . . they . . . incubate. He doesn't know he has them, and doesn't know how to use them, unless he goes on learning. It's . . . it's like warmth to eggs hatching, Doctor. And . . ." George's voice trailed off, and he shrugged.

While George was saying this the doctor was nodding. "And that's the pity of it. Yes." He raised his eyebrows. "Will a job of this sort help at all?"

"It would keep his mind occupied, I think. I don't know exactly what sort of work it is, of course, but I presume that he would be using his brain; and, if so, I think it would be a good thing. The sort of work that the Association does should be interesting to him—especially the cinema part of it. The main thing, I think, is to get some-

thing for him as soon as possible, to get his spirits up again. Now he's getting into poor company—you know the sort of thing only too well, Doctor. End it's becoming quite serious. I've been to his mother's house quite often lately, and I haven't been able to see him because he's always out with these friends of his.

The doctor eyed George in his frank manner. "He's the sort of lad who can be influenced by these people?"

George hesitated. He was not sure, and he did not want to show a lack of confidence in Martin. "He could possibly be led along, in his present state of mind. He's become so sensitive about not having a job."

Saying this, George could not keep out of his voice a certain bitterness. He himself was too close to the general malady of his own people, in which Martin's was only a particular sickness. He worked amongst it, being of his people, feeling like a doctor with no medicine. And Christian de Wet, being a man of the warmest sympathy, understood his feeling.

For a moment George's bitterness might have turned into self-pity, for he was one of his race, for whom the times were bad. But his own temperateness was a check. There had been occasions before, when he had almost broken out in anger, but there had always been the check imposed by this temperateness of nature and by the reflection that the advantages gained in anger were usually short-lived, especially in one's own mind. There, in one's own mind, was the seat of harmony. There the triumph of unreason was facile and precarious.

"... That's the problem, Dalvel: that the younger ones—your younger ones—should not grow to find that they are not considered to be important, that in our country's life they are considered to be only second class risks. Our way of living has to give them their importance. Our failure with young Baart would go farther than him. It goes farther than your race, and mine, farther than all of us. There is a young African who has left the university, as a scientist. I hope he fits in. I hope . . . and I fear . . ." The doctor spoke heavily, as if he were measuring his own worth on the scales of conscience. Then he shook his head

and smiled again, and continued in a lighter tone: "Our mobile cinema—the Association's, that is—is becoming quite a success. It's getting packed houses these last few weeks. They definitely need some help. The young fellow who runs it now is doing a very good job—his father and I are old friends. It won't be so good in winter, of course, so quite soon we shall have to try to arrange to use some of the halls in the Flats."

In such talk the morning passed quickly. George was sorry to have to leave at the end of it, but was a little heartened by the promise of a job for Martin.

"Well, Doctor de Wet, I'm very grateful to you. I'll try to get in touch with Martin as soon as possible. Today, if I can."

Each in his own mind wanted this to turn out well. Each hoped for it; the one from his warm, compassionate heart, the other with a more personal desire.

"You'll get in touch with me, will you? We'll fix him up all right. I hope you'll find him at home this time."

Despite the doctor's optimism, George wished, as he left the house, that he could feel more assurance. He wondered if perhaps it was too late already, if work of the kind that Doctor de Wet promised would be too tame for Martin now. He tried to convince himself that it would be all right, that Martin had no capacity for sustained recklessness, that his nature was against continued defiance; for he thought that Martin coveted peace—like his father, but with a more tortured longing. Martin suffered more than Joe Baart in not having peace. There was an edge to Martin's suffering, which the boy felt as a broken man feels the sharp edge of the knife with which he ends his suffering. But there was the danger that Martin would come to feel the twisted satisfaction of suffering, and George prayed that he would find him now, when there was still time for him to turn again and be glad of the promise of security.

George went to the cottage in the early afternoon. Francis was playing in the trees with his young friends when the car approached, and on seeing it he ran across the road to the house, shouting, "Mama! Linda! It's de

car, Mr Darlvel's car! He's coming now!" And as George left the car and crossed over toward the house, the child peered large-eyed around the open doorway and greeted him. "Good arfternoon, Mr Darlvel. Mama is in de house, end Linda. But not Martin—he's not et home."

George stopped at the gate, the news having robbed him of his main reason for coming. But Joe Baart was also in the small front yard, painting a kitchen chair with the grey paint used for station lavatories. He looked up and greeted George with a grin. George smiled his own greeting in return, first to Francis, then to Joe.

"Hallo, Francis. Good aft'noon, Mr Baart. They keep' yoa busy on Sunday. No rest for the wicked."

Joe shrugged good-naturedly. "Agh, yoa right, Mr Darlvel. Wid dese women, nobody is getting any rest. Yoa got to do dis! Yoa got to mend det! Yoa got to paint de chairs! Phut!"

"Martin is not home?"

Joe's face clouded a little. "No, he's not here et de house. Not since yestiday. But Mart'a cen tell . . . yah, here is Mart'a. She cen tell yoa." Joe was glad to see her in the doorway—to have the responsibility taken from his shoulders. To indicate his withdrawal from the conversation he dipped his brush and continued painting.

"Good-arfternoon, Mr Darl . . . George." This new relationship still came a little awkwardly to Martha. She swung on Joe. "W'y don' yoa tell Mr Darlvel to come in, Yoe!" Then, without waiting for an answer, she turned back to George. "Oud Yoe hesn' got no idea! Please come in." As she turned to enter in front of George, Martha said, without looking round, "Yoa come to see if Martin is here?"

"Yes. End Francis tells me he's not."

"He didn' come home larst night." Martha's voice showed her concern. "It's not nice, not knowing w'ere he is orl de time. He stays away for a long time, end w'en he comes beck he don' talk much." Martha turned to face George as she sat down. She hesitated before continuing: "I don' t'ink he's very heppy dese days. Nobody cen be heppy w'en dey's orlways keeping quiet end not talking

like dey used to. Please sit down, Yeorge. Linda is coming yest now."

Linda had remained in the kitchen when Francis had announced his arrival. She had hastily removed her apron and tidied her hair, and had stood waiting. Her attitude toward George had unconsciously become more hesitant. It had gone back to its beginning, as if to start off afresh. The sense of shame with which she had emerged from last night was now revived by his coming. It was the shame that held her back, until, hearing Martha mention her, she could not without awkwardness keep away any longer.

For his part, knowing Linda was there in the kitchen, George passed the first few moments with his attention diverted, turning his conversation with Martha along the side-channels of his mind, hearing her while he listened for sounds from the kitchen.

"... I s'pose he's wid det Yohnnie Peterson..." Martha stopped as she saw Linda appear, and as George rose. "Linda, Yeorge come to arsk about Martin. Linda is home a little bit before getting enudder yob."

The two young ones smiled diffidently to each other, and there was a moment's pause before George recovered the thread of their talk.

"Yohnnie Peterson a-wh'at sort of work did you say he did, Mrs Baart?"

"Agh, he's a *skellien*! Not so, Linda? A real *skellum*! I don' know w'at he's doing to get a living, but I don' like it. He orlways got too much money—more den most of de boys who is working properly. One time w'en Martin come home he says det dey collect oud clothes end sell dem. He says it's quite a business. End sometimes bottles—yoa know, oud bottles w'at dey collect in secks from orl de houses end den sell to someone who collects dem for de fact'ries—it's a place in Clareview. But I don' know, really. I hear people saying det Yohnnie Peterson got a geng, end dey orl crooks. Yohnnie Peterson is bed. I know for sure det he orlways got too much money. End his pel Skaap Vorster isn' nice."

The feeling in Martha's voice was such as George—and

even Linda—had never heard before, and he knew that it was for her son that she spoke. Johnnie Peterson was only the instrument, and if Martin had returned at that moment she would have immediately forgotten Johnnie. For a moment George did not know what to say, and when he did speak he knew his words were insufficient.

"I suppose there is a chance that Martin will come in this afternoon?"

Martha shrugged. "I don' know, but . . ." Her doubt was clear.

"You see, Mrs Baart, I came to see him if possible, because this morning I was speaking to someone—Dr de Wet. Linda knows him. There is a chance of Martin's getting a job that I think he would possibly like." George hastened to add: "Not away from Cape Town this time. Dr de Wet told me that the Good Hope Association are wanting someone like Martin—someone they can rely on, to work in their office and help with a cinema which they run. I told Dr de Wet that I would try to find Martin as soon as possible."

Martha pondered the news.

"P'reps . . . p'reps. if yoa could find him. I know Yohnnie Peterson got en uncle living down by Witte-bomme, and I know det Yohnnie is staying dere sometimes, becorse Martin mentione' it onc. Maybe his uncle can tell w'ere Yohnnie and Martin is, if dey not already et his house. It's a small chance."

George was prepared to take any chance.

"Yes, we might find out where he is, at any rate. And I hev'n't got anything else to do this afternoon. I might as well go and see." George stopped abruptly. "Would it be hard to find the place?"

Martha began to give directions, but, though being fairly certain of the place herself, she was soon confused. Finally she began to suggest that Joe might go with George, but before she had completed the suggestion she stopped and looked at Linda.

"Agh, I don' know if Yoe is much good. P'reps Linda can find it better. Eh, Linda?"

Linda was caught unaware by the proposal, and before

she could think about it she had murmured, "But I don' know w'ere the place is, Mama."

"It don' metter, Linda. Yoa know w'ere Mrs Oswald is living—down in Mountain Street. Well, Yohnnie's uncle is living near-by, on'y two houses away. Yoa cen show George easy." With which Martha took Linda's assent for granted. "Yoa want to go straight away, Mr Darvel, eh? Linda cen get ready straight away."

As Linda went to prepare herself, Martha, having given George more specific directions, went off to finish some job in the kitchen. George was left thinking of this vast, enduring woman who did not ever forget the duties of her house. He felt that she would always give to each situation in life its proper attention. For her son's erring she had a real, deep anxiety. But for each station which she held—as mother, wife, or neighbour—he felt she would always show the proper respect. And the contingencies of each would never completely disorder the rest. She would always have a core of equanimity.

Linda did not keep him waiting long, and in a few minutes they were leaving. When they came out of the house Joe had finished painting the chair, and was lying on his back on a small patch of grass, his hat over his face. In answer to George's leave-taking he waved his hand airily and grunted some indistinguishable answer.

George drove down into Newlands Avenue, and had turned in the direction of Wynberg before he spoke.

"We go through Wynberg, do we, Linda?"

"Yes, end then across the railway line, toward Witte-bomme."

"By the school—Matchworth School? It seems to be down thet way."

"I'm not very sure, but I think so. I only know the exect place w'en I see it."

George did not want silence between them, but it was so difficult to avoid it. So far they had nothing in common between them—excepting Martin—and now, apart from the pervasive consciousness of Linda's presence, it was Martin who was in his mind.

"I hope we find him."

"Yes. Mama would be glad." Linda's response carried no real conviction.

"Yes. Yes, of course, she will." And he realised that it would mean more to Martha than to him. It was for Martha's sake that he should be concerned. "If we do find him there, I hope we can persuade him to take this job."

"It was very kind of Dr de Wet."

"Yes. And I think it's a good job. Martin ought to like it once he starts. He could get quite far if he does well at it."

"Yoa said they hev a bioscope, and he would be working it?"

"Possibly, yes. It's a mobile one, with a big ven. They might want Martin to start driving it, and help run the bioscope."

Linda felt somehow out of this whole affair. Because between Martin and herself the bonds had always been loose, she was unable to rouse any deep sympathy, nor the concern which even George felt. Since her brother was to her remote, solemn, and moody beyond her understanding, she had felt neither his eagerness nor his disappointments.

"I'm afraid that if he goes on like this he'll get to a stage one day where he's completely disillusioned. You know how he is, Linda—not really a bad lot. He's got a conscience." He was making Linda his confidante. Without being conscious of it, he was bringing her into his own uneasy state of mind. It helped him—letting his thoughts out to Linda—to ease the pressure which they put on his own mind.

"He'll get to believe in some wrong that is being done to him—first by the people who don't want to give him work, then by the whole world. And he'll get an awful, useless defiance against everything. He'll become really bitter. I suppose he's already bitter." These last words he spoke after a momentary pause, and they were not entirely free of bitterness themselves.

It had only been yesterday that Linda had fled from the beach and come back with the purpose of finding Nicholas Saunty; only last night that she had been turned out into

her own humiliation. What George said might have been said of her; she felt as if it had been. And last night was too near for her not to feel the rancour.

"Is . . . is Martin wrong to be bitter?" And she did not look at George as she said it. She did not see his glance at her, nor the quick concern and question in his eyes.

"Perheps not. Perheps the bitterness itself is not wrong. The wrong will be his falling for it. Yes, I suppose the bitterness is natural; it comes from his heart. But what's the use if it goes on end gets the better of his judgment, if it knocks out all his common sense, end becomes a ruling passion, a sort of evil inspiration? When thet happens it goes beyond the one person; it covers everyone around him—in this case you yourself, end your mother, end all your family. It will turn against all of us, all of us Coloureds, because es far es Martin is concerned we will not have come to his help." As George spoke, he was hearing Dr de Wet's words, spoken that morning. "We will have been impotent. End then he'll despise us. If thet happens, Linda, it will be the real tragedy. There is not so much love for us Coloureds that we cen stend losing faith among ourselves."

As he spoke, there was an uncommon and increasing urgency in George's voice, a fervour that made Linda turn to glance at his serious face. There she saw no extra emotion, but only a creasing of his eyelids and a liveliness in his eyes that she could not interpret. What he said, and the spirit that underlay it, were to her an entirely new and strange experience, like that of reading words or hearing music that have a pleasure beyond one's understanding. They put a new light on her world.

". . . We still need so much more confidence in ourselves. We're too uncertain, es if we hed not yet found our right place in the world. We are a *people* now, Linda, end in need of pride in ourselves—like all other people. Perheps, because we are a young people, we should be more aggressive— but not in the same way es . . . es Johnnie Peterson. We want not to be looked on with indifference, or spurned es a nuisance, or treated like a ball between other people's feet. End we can't lose faith in ourselves."

By now they had crossed over the railway line, into the neighbourhood where Johnnie's uncle lived. It was a mixed neighbourhood, along the smudged border-line of separateness; where in one street lived Europeans, and in the next lived Coloured people, with no changes of architecture or social grace between them; where a European schoolboy, fair-haired and brown-legged, met a Coloured boy and walked with him as far as the corner, until the one turned off with a "So long, eh", and the other went on toward his home close by; where all the people had lived in tolerable happiness, and without shame before the world. Mountain Road was a cul-de-sac, so George stopped the car at its entrance, where he and Linda left it and walked into the narrow street.

Linda pointed to one of the small houses a short way up the street. "Mrs Oswald's house is there— that one with a green fence. And Mama said Yohnnie's uncle lives on'y two houses away on the far side."

All the houses were almost identical. To the street each presented a closed and curtained window and a narrow niche of a *stoep* from which a door led into the house. They were set up in bunches of three or four under one roof. In the small front spaces—there were no gardens--youths were oiling bicycles, or parts of old motor-cycles lay unattended. Some of these areas were enclosed, like that of Mrs Oswald's, by low paling fences; while some were open to the pavement. On one *stoep* an old man sat in a collarless shirt, with an unshaven Sunday face, staring at nothing. At the far end of the street a group of small brown boys played a kind of cricket, while out of their range a little way down the street stood a large, square Buick of many years' age, being polished by all the members of one family.

Skaap Vorster was standing on the *stoep* of the house next but one to the Oswalds, as Linda and George turned into the street, and he observed their coming. He watched them pause to identify the right house, and having a quick mind, he turned, entered the house, and went through to the shed in the small back yard. Johnnie was there, lounging against the wall in the sun, and Martin was sitting

with his back to the door-post, with his arms on his knees and his head resting on his arms, as if he were asleep. He looked up briefly as Skaap approached, and then resumed the same position.

Skaap nodded back toward the house, twisting his mouth into a slick grin. "Baart, I t'ink I seen yoa sister. She used to go out a bit wid Piet Krogmas, ch? Yah, well I seen her yest now. She come in a car wid enudder *kerel*. Dey coming dis way—for yoa, ch?" He spoke with the touch of disdain fittin' the situation.

Martin looked up quickly, then appeared to be thinking the matter over, with his shoulders slouched over his clasped arms. He knew who the man was, and he knew that it was George who would want to see him, that Linda was here only to direct George. And Martin wanted to see neither of them. For a moment he felt cornered, and was prepared to sit there and wait; but then, shaking off the hopelessness, he rose suddenly and entered the shed.

"I don' want to see them. Yoa cen say yoa don' know where I am."

Johnnie glanced after him, then turned to Skaap. "Go end tell my bleddy uncle to say we gorn out. We not here for anybody, yoa see, Skaap? Yah, p'reps we gorn to de beach, p'reps to Muzenberg." He chuckled. "If dey like to go end look for us dere, dey cen spend a nice arternoon."

As Skaap re-entered the house Johnnie withdrew into the shed, where Martin was sitting on a box. Martin avoided looking up at Johnnie.

"Yoa don' hev to stay if yoa want to go home wid dem, Baart. Maybe dey want to see yoa for somet'ing special." There was no sympathy in Johnnie's voice, but only a slight sarcasm.

For a moment Martin was tempted. To get up now and leave the shed would be like moving out of a rut into which he had been slipping. But he had no will to do it, for it would be ignominious, and it would mean facing again responsibilities which he now shunned.

Outside in the street George approached the house

alone, Linda being only too glad to agree to his suggestion that she return and wait in the car. Leaving her there, George approached and turned in at the *stoep* of Johnnie's uncle's house. The front door was open, but no one was to be seen as he crossed the small *stoep* and knocked. There was silence from the house. He waited a few seconds, losing hope as each one passed, and then, as he was about to knock again for the last time, someone made a noise inside, and a man appeared in the short passage-way. He was a small individual, with a brown, gap-toothed face and gnarled, walnut appearance whose effect was accentuated by ill-humour and sleepiness. He hitched up his trousers as he came.

Baviaan Masters was thinking that Sunday afternoon was no time to be disturbed, first by one of Johnnie's bunch of young rogues, with some pack of lies that Baviaan was supposed to tell some stranger, and then almost immediately afterward by someone knocking at the door. He squinted at George's silhouette in the doorway, muttering his irritation.

George asked respectfully, 'Mr Peterson?'

The little man shook his head impatiently. "Nie, men! Not me! My name is Marsters. Yoa come to de wrong . . ." He stopped short, scowling. "Agh, *got*, I suppose yoa want Yohnnie, eh!" The mess ge which Skaap had hurriedly given him began to penetrate. He paused a moment. "Nie, Yohnnie is not here. Dey was here some-time today, end I hear him say dey was going for a swim—to Muizenberg, I tink it was. Den dey orl went orf—end bleddy good riddance, too! Orlways hending about end doing not'ing!"

George hesitated before the man's malevolent gaze. "Do . . . do you know if Martin Baart is with them, Mr Masters? He's a . . . a friend of Johnnie's"

"Baart? Baart? Agh, I don know who de hell is orl dere. I don' want to know everyone Yohnnie knows."

"Well, he's a tall . . ." But Mr Masters was shaking his head impatiently, and George gave up. "Cen you say, perheps. where they went at Muizenberg?"

"Nie, end I don' bleddy well care!" And, still muttering

to himself, Johnnie's uncle turned on his heel and shuffled back to his bed, leaving George standing.

A sudden and extraordinary savageness flared up in George for a moment. Then it died, and he shrugged, and made his way back to the car, where he slumped into the seat beside Linda and stared absently up the street, whose vista carried on beyond the railway line to the mountain above Constantia.

"Well, he's not there. I suppose it was Johnnie's uncle I saw. He says they've gone down to Muizenberg to swim — at any rate Johnnie hes, and that fool didn't know if Martin was with them. 'End he didn't know exactly where they hed gone. Oh, why does it hev to . . .!" He stopped himself. After a moment he sighed and turned to Linda. "We could, perhaps, go down there end look." They might hev gone along the beach, past the boats."

Without her having to answer, he saw the unwillingness in Linda's face, and his suggestion faltered.

"It would be a ride, Linda, if nothing else."

While she had sat alone in the car, Linda had thought how good it must be to have this friendship that her brother treated so lightly. She had sat envying this constant assurance of help that Martin could have if he wanted it. Yesterday, with his loneliness, was still so near. She had begun to envy her brother the command he had, by his friendship, over George Dalvel, and she had begun to feel as if she herself were outside the possibility of it. And now here was George, asking her to go with him back to the beach, where Piet and Nellie would still be, where they would probably see her, and enjoy her embarrassment. By being unwilling to go—for she would not face it—it seemed she must move farther away from that for which she had just begun to long. And suddenly, with a feeling of panic, she refused to let her unwillingness be unexplained.

"Perhaps you would like to go alone, George. I . . . I wouldn't mind going really, but yesterday I went down to the beach with some friends, end . . . no, I don't want to meet them again! I never want to see them again!" It

had stumbled out, not as she had wanted to say it, but awkwardly and inadequately. She glanced at him through the corner of her eyes. "I'm sorry . . ."

He was uncertain what to do for a moment. Then he smiled awkwardly.

"Never mind, it would probably be a waste of time, anyway." He started the car, and they began to move away slowly. "Perhaps we could . . . would you like to go for a run somewhere else, Linda? It's a nice afternoon. We could go along by Fish Hook."

Linda nodded her assent. They threaded their way through the narrow streets toward Prince's Drive, and then down past the *vlei* which reflected the mountain, toward the bay. And each felt a new lightness as the moment's awkwardness passed.

It was one of those quite rare days when no wind comes across the bay to whip up the sand on the beach at Fish Hook and take it stinging across the road and up the valley toward the Atlantic on the other side of the Peninsula. The sand was warm and settled, the sea's surf was restrained, and the still, blue water came in close to the steep-sloping shore.

George's knocking was not the last that brought Mr Masters grumbling to the door on that Sunday afternoon. It seemed to him that he had hardly spread himself across the bed, in the attitude of the crucified, when some more knocking abused the proper peace of the day. For a full minute his fuddled brain heard the noise, and he mumbled his curses at the fool who would not go away—hadn't he just told the *domkop* that Johnnie was not here! But the noise continued to hammer into the room, more persistently, and louder. At length he groined for the floor with his feet, stumbled toward the door, slithered into the passage, and turned to the front door, preparing to deliver such a tirade of abuse as would shrivel the fool. But when he saw who it was, his mouth remained open, and his voice stilled.

In the open door stood two big-headed, big-bodied

policemen. Baviaan could not see their faces against the light, but their shape was sufficient to startle him into soberness. In that short second before anyone spoke, his mind flashed over the last few days of his existence and sought desperately for some act of his that had been sufficiently indiscreet to attract the attention of the police. It could find nothing, but neither did it find any assurance; Baviaan Masters was already enrolled in the records of the courts, and he was too aware of the irritating curiosity of the police to feel easy. His mouth opened and closed like a fish's.

'Then he almost sighed audibly as he heard the flat, rasping voice ask for Johnnie Peterson. Out of relief his anger rose again, but this time against his nephew.

'The policemen were by now impatient, and they repeated their inquiry in no gentle manner.

"We got information that this Peterson is at this house lots of the time."

"Yah . . . yah, officer, but I don' t'ink he's h'ere. Anyway, I don' t'ink he's done anyt'ing wrong, eh. Maybe . . ."

"Maybe nothing, eh! That's for us to say. He's here now?"

"I don' t'ink so, officer. . . . Oh, yah, I hear him say he's going out dis arfternoon, . . . Yah, to Muizenberg."

One of the policemen took a step in the house. "Yoa don' want any trouble for yoarself, eh? Yoa don' mind if we hev a look?"

Baviaan instinctively stood aside. "But . . . but I got not'ing to do wid him, officer! No, no, yest go in. P'reps he's here. I donno."

They advanced together into the passage, each almost filling its width, and Baviaan had to squeeze back against the wall to let them pass.

"Where do we go, eh?"

"I t'ink yoa better go right t'rough, officer. Sometime he's coming wid his frien's to de shed in de beck." Mr Masters was feeling better now, even a little superior about the affair. This would teach Johnnie Peterson to do things properly.

When Johnnie saw the two uniforms appear through the

back door he swore under his breath. So did Skaap. At first Martin was unwilling to appreciate what it meant, and he remained sitting by the door, fixed first by unbelief and then by a darkening hopelessness. This was what he had feared for a long time, and what he had tried to avoid thinking of. During the last few weeks, as he had sunk deeper into the activities of the gang, his own participation in them had become more automatic, while his revulsion from them, and his fear of their consequences, had stayed with him. He had, in his participation, seemed to desire to test the limits of isolation, to scour the very niches of his soul as a penitent. Johnnie and Skaap had been prepared, and would now fight; they would bluster and protest, but Martin would accept.

The policemen ordered him to stand up, but when he had done so they both turned their attention to the other two, whom they knew.

"Well, Peterson, we got some questions, eh. Yoa been getting about a bit lately. Yoa were seen up in Wilks Road yesterday."

Johnnie affected indifference. "Maybe, I dunno. Anyway, I s pose I c en go up Wilks Road if I like. No law to say I can't."

"Let's hev no check, eh. Then we c en all be friends."

"O.K., Constable. But I wa ' u in Wilks Road."

At this point Skaap interjected. "I been nowhere near Wilks Road!"

One of the policemen turned on him. "Yoa shut up! We're not asking you, Vorster. Anyway, where Peterson is, it's a chance yoa are. Yoa two we know bleddy well."

The other continued to address Johnnie. "We want to hev a look round. No objections?"

They had appeared to take little interest in Martin, but suddenly one of them turned to him. "Yoa got mixed up with these two, eh. Yoa must be the other one. Oright, yest stay here es well, while we hev a look." He turned to his colleague. "O.K. André, look in the shed."

Johnnie protested heatedly. "Yoa got a summons to look? Yoa can't yest push us round end go looking anywhere."

The burlier of the two policemen grabbed his collar and pushed him into the shed. "Come on, Peterson! We got a warrant oright. End no nonsense. Let's get looking, eh."

They all knew what it was that the police were looking for. Martin as well as any of the others knew what he and Johnnie had picked up in Wilks Road the day before. And Johnnie particularly, as he was pushed into the shed, was cursing bitterly to himself that he had not seen to it that the evidence of that business had been destroyed. As it was, only a few minutes were required for one of the policemen, with Johnnie looking on, to find the handbag behind a stack of wood. He turned and grinned at Johnnie.

"Well, well, eh Peterson! Hendbegs are for ladies, end maybe for pensies— end yoa're not a pensy, eh, Peterson? End maybe even yoar mother was no lady, eh?"

He caught Johnnie's arm and led him out into the sunlight. "O.K., let's go." He jerked his head toward the house, and they formed a small procession as they went in through the back door, down the passage, and on to the *stoep*. Baviaan Masters kept well in the background, and peered after them with relief at his own good fortune as they passed the door of the room into which he had skipped as they approached.

In front of the house the police van had drawn up, and Johnnie, Skaap, and Martin were bundled roughly into the back of it. The door was locked on them and on one of the policemen, and the van backed down to the end of the street and turned in the direction of the police station.

Martin had often seen the fierce, unfeasonable, brute mastery of drunks in back-street fights. He had always avoided such incidents. He had all his life, since the fights of early boyhood—which he had always lost—been made almost sick by physical force, and had been repelled by the mere sight of it. Now he was caught up in it, being pushed down the steps of the house and across the pavement, being hoisted brusquely into the back of the dark van where thieves and murderers had travelled—for now he was one of them, no better than them. He was thankful only that the closed-in van shut out the sight of the world.

After a short journey they halted, the doors at the back

were pulled open, and they were hauled out on to the pavement again and into the police station, through the partition that separated European from non-European delinquents, and into the charge office. Here the police were even less moderate than before, knowing their mastery, and enjoying it.

As they pushed Skaap forward, he stumbled and fell against the wall. Looking round at the grinning young constable, he swore. 'Yoa fo . . . ! Yoa got no right to push a men down ! Yoa bring us here widout any reason, end yoa reckon . . . '

"Shut up, Voister ! So yoa think yoa re a men, eh ! Well, well."

Another of the policemen on duty, who had seemed to be doing nothing, advanced and dragged Skaap to his feet, grinning widely in his authority.

"Come on, men ! Stend up ! Yoa're in a police station now, not et home."

Skaap tried to shake himself loose. The uniformed youth, pretending to lose his grip, pushed him hard against the wall again. The others on duty were enjoying it.

Martin was still held submissive by his own disbelief and abhorrence. His whole spirit was, to begin with, crumpled by this new powerlessness on his side and by the unbounded, relentless power on the other. There was no opening or appeal out of it, only confinement within it, as crushing and immovable as a foot pressed down on his chest.

Suddenly, without having conceived it even a moment before, and without measuring his chances, he tried to break away. He eluded the grasp of the nearest policeman, but before he had gone a few feet another one, nearer the door, tripped him up as he dashed past. He thudded forward on to the floor. As they picked him up by his collar they were grinning.

Chapter 13

MARTIN could not bring himself to look down into the body of the small court-room. The people on the other sides of the low walls of the dock fell into his background, into a past that he had almost forgotten, for he had passed out of their world, as surely as if he were now an animal in an enclosure. He did not, therefore, see that George Dalvel was there, alone of all the people whom he knew. All those people, and the life outside, had no place in the present reality.

This reality centred round the little man standing in the well of the court-room, trim in his tight, black office jacket, with a neat blonde moustache that was cut very short. With apparent indifference this man brought forth his players, to stand a few moments in the witness-box and then sink back into the people sitting on the benches behind: the sharp-featured, well-dressed woman who spoke precisely and without nervousness; the Coloured gardener employed by her, stammering out his evidence; the Coloured policeman standing to attention and addressing himself without hesitation to the magistrate, who sat hunched like an idol in the high chair.

. . . Yes, the handbag produced in the court was hers. What had it contained when she had last had it in her possession, at her home? Five pounds, she could remember for certain, some small change, a lipstick, and a few other odds and ends. The five pounds were in notes? Yes, in one-pound notes. Had she ever seen the lipstick which was now produced to her? Yes, it was hers. Had she seen the accused before? No, but the gardener had seen . . . Had *she* seen them, herself? No. Where, could she remember, had she last seen the handbag in her house? On a stand in the hall, quite near the door. Easily visible from the door, to someone standing there? Yes. And she had said that her house was in Wilks Road? Yes, Mayerling, Wilks Road. . . .

. . . He worked as a gardener at Mayerling, Wilks Road? Yes. Did he remember Saturday, March 2nd? Er . . . yes, yes. Had he seen the accused before? Yes. Would he tell the court the circumstances in which he had seen them? On Saturday—last Saturday—he saw the two of them on the *stoep* of the house, with baskets with fruit in them, like hawkers. They were just hurrying down the steps into the drive. They went to the gate and out into the road. . . .

And so it went on. Martin, sitting with his head slightly lowered, could see through his closed lids all the happenings that were worded out in the stuffy court. He could have told them, if he had the courage to; he could have avoided all this devious examination into things which were so plain to him; he could have told them from the beginning—that it was they who had done it, he and Johnnie, that Skaap had not been there, that it had been simply and swiftly done. But instead it must be played like a game with intricate rules, in which it was his part to keep silent while the man in the black coat prompted his players. And the end of the game, rightly and properly, as with the Bashi-Bazouks in the puppet shows, would come with their defeat, his and Johnnie's. And the man in the black coat would begin all over again, with someone else.

The few spectators behind them shuffled and sniffed, waiting for the end of this game and the beginning of the next. These two in the dock were of little interest, for they were neither this one's brother, nor that one's husband. One, who had dropped in on passing, hoping to hear of an assault, or murder, rose and tip-toed to the door and the street, disappointed. His freedom belonged to another world, and so did the alien streets. Martin's was a closed desolation, to which he had already accustomed himself, which he had come to accept as his proper due.

"Thirty days, or ten pounds." So that was it: this desolation to continue for thirty days. To pay one's due to society for thirty days.

Martin and Johnnie were ushered through the hole in the floor of the dock, down the steps into the cellar, and the

next protagonist passed them on his way up, grinning gap-toothed and unabashed. Up there the man in the tight black coat would be changing his script.

They were kept waiting in the cellar, where it was at any rate cooler. Johnnie was looking thoughtful.

"Don' worry, Baart; I reckon Skaap cen maybe help. Twenty pound, eh! I t'ink it's possible, Baart. Before dey let him go I tole him to get some money ready. Yah, Baart, I reckon it's possible."

The possibility did not encourage Martin. He was not sure that he wanted hope. The thirty days were to be accepted, and at the moment he looked no farther than that, for to know how the next thirty days were to be filled was in some way comforting. They released him from an uneasy responsibility.

They had been down there only a short time when a constable approached. Martin did not bother to look up, but Johnnie, keeping Skaap in mind, grinned expectantly.

"Oright, *jong*. Baart? Which of yoa is Baart?" Martin looked up, and Johnnie nodded toward him. "Yoa Baart? O.K., somebody paid the fine for yoa. Yoa cen bugger off, eh." The policeman said it grudgingly.

Appearing not to understand, Martin looked from the policeman to Johnnie, who still held the grin on his face, and who shrugged, before indicating to Martin that he should go. For Johnnie it was just the luck of things.

"Go on, Baart. Mus' be yoa friend de schoolmarster. Do w'at de constable says, men! I'll see yoa some udder time." And as Martin began to demur, he shook his head impatiently. "Go on, men, forget it!"

As Martin hesitated, the policeman sneered at him. "Yoa like us so much, Baart? So yoa want to stay, eh?" And then more brusquely! "Come on, don' waste my time, *jong*! Move on! Out thet way." He took Martin's shoulder and led him toward the steps, and up into the yard, where, indicating the gate, he turned him loose. "... End if yoa want to come lack some time, try the same thing. We be gled to see yoa." "

Coming out into the lane Martin felt at a loss. He felt, too, a certain resentment. Johnnie was right, of course; it

must have been George who had paid the fine, and who had thereby reintroduced the need to order one's life, and be accountable for all one's acts. There would now be no simple release for thirty days from all liability.

To be free now meant so little. To be free for what? to go where?

He emerged from the lane into the street, still quite undecided.

"Hallo, Martin."

Martin stopped short on hearing George's greeting, but he did not turn to look his friend in the face. Suddenly, and for a moment, he felt passionately angry. Why, in the face of his proved guilt, must they come with their compassion! From their blamelessness why come! Wrong could not be undone. He and guilt were now inseparable. There was no dispensation they could give — to think so was presumption!

"Can I give you a lift? I was going back past your house." George wished to say more. He wished to take things back to their beginning, when Martin had left school, so that he could go to him now and say that there was a good job, which would be interesting for him, and which would give him the chance which he had tried to get during all the past months. But instead there was a constraint upon them both, mainly, this the wrong time. George was satisfied enough when Martin, without saying anything, fell in step with him and walked with him to the car.

George did not hurry as he drove up through Wynberg Park toward the road that would bring them round to Kirstenbosch and the cottages. He wanted time, before they arrived there, to introduce his latest proposal to Martin, as casually as possible. He made the first approach as the car wound through the quiet, empty Park.

"Martin, I'm going over to Vanberg tomorrow—you know the place, over the nek from Stellenbosch, going down toward Paarl. I'm going over to see my uncle, who lives on one of the farms there. I wondered if you would like to come. I wondered, even, if you would care to spend a few days over there."

George knew that his intention was patent, but he refused to be ashamed or deterred. He had told Martha of it, and she was grateful. They both hoped that the few days spent at Vanberg would be good for Martin.

"It's lovely in the valley just now. The fruit's still on. You might even like to spend some of the time picking. End my uncle is a nice old chep. He'd be only too gled to see you."

He waited for Martin to think it over, and did not urge him to answer.

To Martin it mattered little one way or the other. He knew why George was suggesting it; to keep him away from town for a while, to let him rest and then come back ready to start afresh. Martin could not help smiling to himself; George was almost too good and simple a friend, too eager to help him back to reason, to put him on the right road again. But he admitted to himself that the proposal fitted the present circumstances, for going to Vanberg would fill the next few awkward days, would give peace, in which there would be no one who knew him well. And Vanberg, he knew, was warm among the mountains.

"Oright. End . . . thank you . . . George. End, George, I hev'n't thenked you for . . . for paying the fine. It was a lot of money. Someday, I'll pay it beck. I will!" For a moment Martin's voice sprang with the young earnestness which George knew, before he appeared to become aware again of his own self-consciousness, and to shrink back into the seat. But it made George happier as he turned down toward the cottage.

Only Martha and Francis were home. The child was in the small yard as George and Martin left the car and approached the cottage. He hung back a little, his hands held behind his back, and he smiled shyly to Martin before turning abruptly and pretending to be busy with the soap-box on wheels. Martha, waiting all morning, had seemed to move about placidly, doing her chores with the same care, dusting and banging cushions with her usual energy. The expectancy and the hope had been closed up in her heart. Last night George had been confident that

Martin would be returning with him from the court, that as a first offender he would be treated lightly. So all morning she had, with the outward tranquillity of heavy, labouring creatures, hoped, and been only a little afraid.

When they entered the cottage she came from the kitchen, and paused in the opening, and though in her deep heart was a confusion of joy and embarrassment, she showed on her face the simple gladness of welcome, as if Martin had been away only a day.

George hastened to speak immediately they entered. "I've jest been telling Martin, Mis Baart, that I wanted to go over to Vanberg tomorrow to see my uncle, and I mentioned that he might like to come, and that he might even like to stay a few days there. It would be very pleasant at this time of the year."

Martha had glanced at Martin, wishing to assure him with her look, but he had avoided her eyes. She spoke directly at him.

"It sounds nice, Martin. Yoa should take such a chance—I'm sure yoa'll enjoy it. Yoa 'member how nice it is w'en we go over for de day by Elgin. It's lovely in de mountains." She turned to George. "It's very kind of yoa, George. Yoa going tomorrow, eh?"

It was plain to Martin that they had decided it for him, that they had taken his assent for granted, but he was not inclined to strain against the idea. And since there was nothing standing in its way, he even began to find some merit in it. Vanberg was drawn down into the deep warm groins of the mountains; the vines on the lower slopes would still be bearing grapes; the pines grew cool along the line of the stream, bordering the bottom of the plum orchards; the trees made a shade, and the rocks threw off a warm light, and the light and the shade were neutral and undemanding. At Vanberg there was a dignity of elemental things.

So it was arranged that they would go, the three of them; for Linda was not due to start work at her new place—a house in Clareview—until the following week. And when it was done George remained at the cottage only a

short while, hoping that Linda would arrive home. But she did not, and he left them, looking forward to tomorrow.

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The pass above Stellenbosch is called Helshoogte. As you come up to it, out of the oak-lined streets of the town, you have away behind you the low hills that level out into the Flats and look across to the Peninsula, which is the first foothold in the country. And before you is the first great valley, where the Berg River flows down past La Gratitude in Franschhoek, and Simondium, and Paarl, and on to the sea farther north. The great land closes in behind you, and if—as the road goes down like a white skein to the pattern of vineyards—you turn off to the right, you come under the sheer-uprising mountain, which is Vanberg, giving its name and its protection to the valley that curls beneath it before going down to join the greater valley where the Huguenots first came. There is a calm air in this upper valley, with its tree-enfolded river, its orchards and vineyards, and its farm buildings shaded by great oaks. Everything is fruitful. And since the sun comes warm there, its heat tempered by so many glancing slopes and green surfaces, the people are not so dry and humourless as those on the harsher Platte-land. They have inherited the tolerance from the valley's soil.

Old Karl Dalvel was like that. He had come when he was young, from Binnedaal, the German mission which itself lies in a corner of the mountains some miles away—from one peaceful place to another, never having been tested or angered by the world. He had come to be a labourer long ago, when Jacob Vermeulen had lived at and ruled over the farm of Maanskyn. And now, under Johannes, Jacob's son, Karl was a trusted hand, taking charge in the big sheds where the plums and grapes were wrapped and packed in boxes by other Coloureds, many of whom were by now Karl's own children and grandchildren.

In the warm evenings, when the young people played guitars and made love, Karl sat by his door, looking across the lands to the line of trees by the river, smoking, saying little, wanting nothing.

At the time when Karl had come here, his brother, Klassie, had gone to Cape Town, with the skill that had been taught him by the German fathers at Binnedaal. He could make good furniture, as the fathers themselves had learned to make it, and he had prospered, working first for a man who liked things well done, and then as his own master, to whom people had come for good workmanship. And George was his son.

And Karl, who had been to Cape Town only once—for his brother's wedding—was as proud of his nephew as he was of his own sons. For the boy, having learned not only from books but also from the goodness of his own father, was wise; and he knew the ways of the city and the larger world, which was knowledge neither acquired nor needed, but greatly respected, among the fruit-pickers of Vanberg. So George was always welcome at Karl's cottage, and so were his friends. And for George's part, he was always glad to go there.

Driving down from Helshoogte, he warmed again at the sight of the valley.

"You've been here before, Linda? I know you hev, Martin."

Linda answered: "No, not to Vanberg. We came once to Franschoek."

"She'll like it, won't she, Martin? You remember that time we came for the day? It was some time ago—the last holidays before you left school." He turned the car into the smooth dirt road that led off to the right, where a country store dozed in the shadow of oak trees. From there the road swooped and turned more steeply, dropping all the time toward the bottom of the valley. They passed large whitewashed fruit sheds, where boxes were stacked for filling.

"Uncle Karl is about the most contented men in the world. I don't think he often goes into town these days, not even into Paarl. He'll certainly never leave for good. End you can't wonder et it, either, with all this around him. There's something almost false about it, eh? It's almost too good, and unreal, especially if you hev to leave it end go beck to the other things. It puts a sort of spell on you."

Martin recalled the other occasion when George had spoken like this at Somerset West, and he suddenly understood—as he had not attempted to then—the attraction against which George must constantly strain. He saw George caught in a way of life in which he stayed only with reluctance.

To the sight before them, and to George's enthusiasm, Linda and Martin responded in their different ways. To her it was rather the occasion than the place that gave pleasure. When on other occasions she had come to the mountains, it had been with so many others, on the back of a lorry, or on the annual excursion train to Elgin. Now she was coming to a valley that was lovelier than Elgin, and she was coming more importantly. It almost seemed that it was for their own pleasure that the valley was opening out beneath them.

For Martin it was a grudging admission of pleasure, a feeling that began by having to overcome distrust. He had been silent for most of the journey from Cape Town, and now he would admit only with a nod the loveliness of this rich, peaceful place, of the thick woods tucked under the vast height of Vanberg peak.

Having arrived at the cottage, they were given an open but undemonstrative welcome by Karl. He chuckled warmly as he shook hands with Linda, showing the false front teeth which he wore only on occasions such as this. And taking Martin's arm as if they met often and were old friends, he led them into the small, whitewashed cottage which was kept neat and clean by his daughter, Marion. Karl's wife had been dead many years.

"Yoa come yest in time. Marion come across a little w'ile ago to get some cawffee ready. So we better hev it first, before we do any'ing else."

At that moment Marion entered from the tiny kitchen at the back. She smiled her greeting to her cousin George, and having greeted Linda and Martin with the same unassuming warmth as Karl's, she retired again to bring in their coffee. Larger and more buxom than her father, she seemed to possess the same placid nature as the valley itself, undisturbed by the tensions felt in cities.

"Well, we picked a good day to come, Uncle Karl."

"Yah. A lovely day, eh! We hed good wedder lately. De grapes is good dis year—we busy picking dese days, end yoa cen come end watch. I cen also give yoa some to take beck." He turned suddenly to Martin. "But yoa staying for a few days, eh, Mr Baart? YGeorge arks me in a letter, but I'm orlways telling him det he don' ever need to arsk; we orlways gled to hev him or anyone else et Venberg. It's a bit quiet over here, but it's a nice change from Cape Town, I s'pose."

Karl had said it before George could forestall him, and he went on, unaware of the embarrassment of both George and Martin at this revealing of the prepared plan. "Yah, we quite proud of Venberg, end Maanskyn, end we like to hev people come end visit."

Marion intervened with the coffee. For the next quarter of an hour they listened—as George had often listened, and never without enjoyment—to Karl's story of the farm: how he had come as a boy, when, outwardly, things had been much as they were now, not as bustling and business-like, but as rich and fruitful, when Jacob Vermeulen had ruled Maanskyn as a patriarch. When Jacob had died, his son, Johannes, had been away in North Africa, in the Army. Karl's voice had a note of pride as he told how the old lady, Mrs Vermeulen, had commanded the farm for the following years, continuing with the help of her workers, holding the reins while Karl and one or two of the other old men led the place by the head. And when Johannes had returned, she had died. Johannes now owned and ran Maanskyn, with newer ideas and more machines, but with the same closeness to the earth.

Through the account, as through the whole history of the place, ran a constancy which George envied whole-somely, and which Martin, sensing it less clearly but more angrily, distrusted as being untrue to the uncertainty of things. Hearing it, and distrusting it in this way, Martin began to feel that this constancy, this calm which belonged to Vanberg, must in some way be tested and proved wrong. For no place had a right to claim peace for itself, no place could keep itself so apart from the world. As they had

turned off the main road and come down into the valley, he had acknowledged that George might be right in his poorly disguised plan. He had become resigned to stay at Vanberg, to be left alone for a few days. He had looked ahead, to when these few days would be over and he would go back to Cape Town, and had wondered—what then? But he had let that thought go, and that time look after itself. For the present he would be thankful for old Karl Dalvel's hospitality, and take what the valley could give. Now, as he listened to Karl, this feeling of resignation gave way to a more positive attitude. It was as if he challenged the valley to prove its excellence.

Shortly, they left the cottage for the packing-sheds. Skirting Maanskyn itself, which lay cool among the trees, white-gabled and black-shuttered, its walls whitewashed clean for the summer, the dirt road led them to the vineyards, and through them up the slopes toward the sheds. There, in the warm interior, the trays and boxes, full and empty, were piled all about, and packing operations were in full swing. They spent most of the morning there, watching, and meeting George's cousins, and when toward lunch-time Linda and George left to make their way back to the cottage by a longer route, Martin remained at the shed with Karl. For a moment, standing amid the clatter of the place, he speculated on the worth of staying and working here. For these people were happy. But he remembered Somerset West, and let the idea pass. Finally, with Karl he walked back to the cottage.

They returned by a different way from that along which they had come, along a road that kept to the side of the valley, above orchards that went down to the river. Above them, on their right, the side of the valley rose unevenly, with vineyards merging into high trees. They came to a point where higher up the slope among the trees a large house showed, from which came faintly the noise of people's voices, and of water splashing. There were one or two large sun-umbrellas standing on a terrace. Karl seemed not to notice the place, and did not slacken his pace.

Martin drew his attention to it. "Is it a farm, Mr Dalvel? Seem to be plenty of people there!"

Karl looked up at the house and frowned. "*Nie*, it's not a farm—not any more." For a moment he said no more, and Martin was left guessing. A short distance farther on, they turned down a path that led down the side of the orchard, to a place where a fallen tree crossed the stream. As they crossed and came to the far bank, Karl nodded over his shoulder toward the house on the slope, as if, having reached home ground, he could talk.

"Det house is Blaauvallei. One time it was a farm, belonging to oud Mr. Bester. Mr Bester end my oud marster was good frien's. But den he died, end his son—dey call him Klein Ferdie—don't like farming, so he sold de farm. Some of it Johannes Ve meulen bought, end some of it, Mr Britz on de next farm. But de house is turned into a hotel by someone. I don't unnerstend how a men can sell a place w'at is so nice." Karl's inability to believe was plain enough in the way he shook his head. "Anyway, dey orlways got lots of people dere now, orlways larking, end . . . well, I reckon dey lies a good time. Oud Ferdie Bester would hev a fit." Karl continued to shake his head in disapproval as they approached his cottage.

After lunch Karl left his three visitors to their own inclinations while he returned to the sheds. George and Linda had only the one day in which to get about, and without wasting any time after the meal they intended to go and explore the valley. Martin, however, declined George's suggestion that they all go together, so they left him sitting in the sun at the door of the cottage. It was not for some time that he stirred himself, and began to walk up the valley, in the opposite direction from that taken by the other two.

Up there were fewer trees, and the valley opened out below him, giving a clearer view toward Franschoek and the mountains beyond. Above him, its krautzes showing deep, wide furrows down its face, Vanberg Mountain rose sheer and massive, blocking out half the sky. And below, the vines climbed more steeply. The grapes were ripe for picking on these slopes, and Martin, climbing among them, stopped now and then to pick a cluster and to sit eating them. The heights immediately above were so

gauntly blue and barren, and those away beyond Franschhoek were so remote, that the very richness and warmth of the soil around him, bearing and nourishing everything so easily and so flagrantly, were sensual by contrast.

At length, when much of the afternoon had passed, Martin began to descend. He walked down from the vineyards to the road, the same road along which, lower down, he and Karl had walked that morning. Before he came to that part of it which ran below the house that was once Ferdie Bester's he turned off, and approached the line of trees that marked the course of the stream. Coming through them, where they were thick and untidy, he found a pool in front of him, where a large tree-trunk had fallen and had partly dammed the water back to form the smooth, dark stretch. In the heat of the afternoon it was so inviting that he walked along the sloping bank to the head of the pool, and lying across one of the dry rocks, he dipped his head to drink. At that moment he heard a sound lower down the stream. Still lying on his belly, he turned his head to see what it was.

A woman had entered the small clearing at its other end. She had not yet seen him, for she came on a few paces—her eyes idling along the surface of the water—before she looked ahead toward the rocks. As her eyes met his, Martin scrambled, to his feet and sprang back to the bank. His first impulse was of guilt, and then of foolishness. He had been caught, possibly on someone else's land—possibly on hers—unawares, and as she continued to stare at him, with more surprise than he guessed, he looked about quickly for a way of escape. She was between him and the fallen tree. He might have leapt the stream by the rocks at this end of the pool, but he was conscious of the greater indignity this would give to his escape. Finally he turned to go back through the trees.

She spoke to him. "Don't go."

He stopped in the act of turning.

"And please don't be alarmed. I've no doubt you have as much right here as I have—possibly more." She was smiling at him now. He, glancing at her, caught the impression of her dark hair, like Linda's; the amusement and

interest in her eyes; in her ears, small gold earrings; and her costume, leaving bare her slim, tanned waist.

"It's not my river. I have no particular right here." As she said it, the amusement was more apparent in her voice.

Martin was standing uneasily, feeling like a small boy waiting to be dismissed. That she was European, and that she was enjoying herself at his expense, made his uneasiness worse.

"You looked like Narcissus." And with a slight wave of her hand she seemed to indicate that the place itself played a part in the illusion. She showed no disposition to be aloof; on the other hand, while talking she was openly appraising him with the arrogance of a woman who is certain of her own attraction. She evidently saw no impropriety in prolonging the encounter.

"This is such a delightful place that I shall want to remember it, and it would help me if I knew your name; but no more than that, so that there can always be a mystery about it." Her laughter was very attractive.

Martin heard himself say, "It's Martin. Martin . . ."

"That's all—for the time being. So now this will have been a brief encounter with a special charm, because there will be so much about it that is unexplained."

Martin suddenly thought that she was mad; with such assurance did she seem to be creating her own situation.

She had sat herself above the banjo, and spread her skirt round her slim, shapely legs, framing herself in a picture, emphasising, as she leaned back, the beauty of which she was so aware. And he himself fumbled before the effect of her deliberate charm.

"This is a lovely place, and yet nobody comes here." She stared at him deliberately. "I come often—every evening, when the moon has come up."

He could not mistake the invitation in her glance just before she swung lightly on to one arm, rose to her feet, and disappeared through the trees in the direction of the orchard and the house on the slope.

Martin's embarrassment did not cease with her disappearance, for it had all happened so quickly. He was

left standing, dwelling on her strangeness, her enchantment, and the vivid impression of her parting look. As he crossed the stream over the fallen tree-trunk, and moved out of the shade of the trees into the field beyond, his excitement grew; and with it grew his apprehension. His slow-moving senses, thawing from the immediate encounter, saw her striking beauty more clearly, focusing for no reason on the two small gold earrings and the slim, tanned waist. Over and over, he reviewed the brief incident that had passed like a vision, recalling all its detail: the grace of her walk, her voice, her talking to him with an arrogant equality. In their momentary relationship there had been patronage and superiority on one level, and a reckless equality on the other. Only now did he see that for a moment there had been a fierce confidence between them. Then she had gone, like a temptress, saying that she would be there tonight - for that was how he now understood her.

For Martin the afternoon, though well advanced, now began to drag slowly. His thoughts, avoiding the choice and the decision, curled themselves about her image while he tried to behave normally in the presence of the others. As the day progressed it became more and more unreal, more like a nervous dream.

They had now accepted that he would be staying with Karl, and the doubt that he himself had felt was no longer possible. Later in the evening, when the valley had begun to darken, George took an opportunity of telling Martin about the job offered by the Good Hope Association, and he was a little surprised by Martin's response; Martin accepted the idea with a mildness that was almost an indifference, and George hoped that Vanberg was already beginning to work.

It was only as George and Linda were about to leave, soon after supper, that Martin had misgivings. Their departure would cast him loose on his own decisions, but at the same time it would make his decision for him; for his only alternative to the invitation in the girl's eyes would be to leave Vanberg. And he was not hard enough to take his pleasures easily, to face this evening with composure.

It was already dark when they left, and Martin looked for the moon. Declining Karl's invitation to go down to the other cottages, where there would be singing, he sat on the stone step, waiting. With Karl's dying footsteps all noise went out of the night, but for the ripple of a smaller stream which flowed near the cottage toward the larger stream in the pine trees. Maanskyn had been named after the moon, and tonight the whole farm seemed to be keeping a tryst which it had patiently and confidently kept through many such nights. The only commotion was in Martin himself.

At length the moon came, lighting first the opposite heights so that they appeared to be part of a grey, lunar barrenness. As the light came lower into the valley, the trees by the stream kept their darkness. Finally, as it reached the cottage, Martin rose and walked through the vineyard.

He walked slowly toward the trees.

When he crossed the stream and stood nervously on its far bank he saw her, sitting where she had sat for a moment that afternoon. She wore a white dress, with a defiance that underlined the afternoon's arrogance. Martin hung back, but she had seen him, and without moving from her position she waved to him. He approached a little, then stood a few feet away. As he stood there she reached up to take his hand, and he stepped forward.

"Sit down." She laughed in a soft ripple of sound, softer than the water's laughter. "No one will come."

As Martin came down beside her he found that she had spread a rug there.

Everything by now had become incredible, as if he were not really taking part in it. The whole day seemed to have passed under a spell; it was a parenthesis in which his volition was numbed by an enchantment of his senses, breaking into the sequence of his life with a crazy delight. This girl whose name he did not know was beautiful and wanton, and suddenly he gloried in her wantonness and in the warm extravagance of her yielding.

"It's a lovely, lovely night, Martin!" Still holding his hand she lay back, arraying her white form on the sloping

bank as if she meant to mock the place with purity. Seeing her as she meant him to see her, Martin's restraint snapped like a string, and his strength was as fierce as hers as he came down to smother the laughter lying on her parted lips. Her body was strong and smooth and warm. And then the night ceased, and the moon, and all the common things and ordinary passions.

Long afterwards the calm came. Lying beside each other, facing the cold sky that showed between the trees, they were like two shells that drifted slowly apart on a smooth tide, both letting the ebb carry them unresisting. At length she laughed again, with the same soft, warm laughter.

"How wonderful that we met—and in this lovely place. It was so colourless up there, until this afternoon and now. You came in time to redeem the place."

On Martin's reaction, where doubt was already beginning to harden into revulsion, her words dropped like cold water. He shuddered with the vileness of it all, despised himself and her, sickened of his weakness and the world. Suddenly he leapt up and fled from her and from the dark place, stumbling through the stream, not minding the shock of the icy water. He broke out into the moonlight where the rows of vines showed clearly, and raced between the low, clutching branches. But as he neared the farm he turned aside, and his pace slackened. He followed any path that showed before him, going angrily away from the direction of the trees, toward the dark side of the valley. There were no more delusions made by the moon.

. . . To make a holiday for whores! To live in the Brave New World and be a biological diversion! Pick you up and put you down, like a drink left forgotten in the corner of the room. Oh, what a sweet, ravishing confidence it had been! With their own bodies they sow the bastard people, and then with their own hands they make a fence round the crop, leaving gates for their own picnickers to come and go. . . .

But he paused in this reviling. There was no good sitting on the rock at the foot of this precipice, staring heavily across the valley. There was no good in coveting a vague

vengeance on her and all her kind, and demanding of a partisan God that they be cursed; because before vengeance came impotence, and before God came distrust.

The moon passed over the valley, which darkened, and in the same darkness Martin turned back toward the cottage. Just as he reached the yard he stopped, turned suddenly, and went to the small stream which flowed nearby. On its bank he threw off his clothes and plunged into the water, to numb and wash himself savagely before returning to the bank and to the cottage. Karl was snoring through the open doorway of the second room as Martin dried himself with his shirt, before sliding beneath the blankets that had been laid out on the small settee. Lying there, with one arm hanging limply toward the floor, he saw nothing but the dim square of the window, through which came the silence of the night, bringing no sympathy.

Chapter 14

MARTIN stayed the next day at Vanberg, avoiding the river, walking up behind the farm, lying with his face in the grass and trying to sleep in the sun. That morning there seemed no purpose in returning home, nor in George's new suggestion, for where was the purpose in working for a 'Charity; showing films on Saturday nights in sheds where *skaaps* could come in from the cold with bottles of cheap wine in their shirts; doling out second-hand shoes to snotty children with twisted feet . . . look up and see my face little brother, the charity is in my giving, the faith and hope are in my eye.

But as the day went on another purpose slowly hardened in his mind, born out of a comprehension that there was no alternative now but to go back to Johnnie. He had sensed it last night, sitting on the rock under the steep slope and reviling the night, and now, reviewing behind his hot, sun-hurt eyes the future, and the past of yesterday, he could see no purpose but to go with Johnnie, and repay last night in Johnnie's manner. There would no longer be the negative purposelessness of previous times, for last night formed the kernel of his purpose, hard in the centre, and holding him, for he would be on a par with Johnnie, in his cynicism and rebellion. Johnnie was the fitting instrument of this mood, and beyond him no purpose was needed; he and his ways were sufficient.

Because all this did not come easily to him. Martin required the whole day for it to form into a decision, so he was at Vanberg until the evening, and he lay that night with it close to the surface of his sleep. Early the next afternoon he left the cottage, having made his excuses to Karl, and he walked up the dirt road to the store near the top of the *nek*.

The first lorry took him through Stellenbosch and then north toward the Paarl road, where the driver dropped

him at the turning of another farm road. From there Martin walked for a few miles before getting another lift, which took him near Bellville, and at this point, where the outer suburbs of Cape Town brought him too close to home, he lingered about the place with no aim other than to avert his home-coming. For it was like his return from Somerset West had been, in his reluctance to face his mother. But then he had come daunted, and now he came with a purpose which he had not the courage to let her know. He had this time committed himself almost beyond the strength of his own resolution, to go with Johnnie whom Martha distrusted.

At length he took another lift into Cape Town itself, and made his way home. For tonight, at any rate, things could be left. As he walked up the road toward the cottage, he faced the realisation that there had come a turning point, away from the old comfort that Martha had always given. It was necessary now to contemplate his independence, to shake from himself the unquestioned need that he had always felt for her, for she with her goodness could never be a part of a life turned against order and obedience. Knowing this, he approached the cottage with a sense of sad finality, feeling even more sharply the comfort which he was being forced by no one but himself to give up, but whose loss he himself was unable to prevent. Now, more than ever, he felt the impact of her presence in all his life.

Martha and Linda were home, and Martha greeted him with surprise.

"Martin! Yoa, cor & beck soon—before yoa s'posed to. Tomorrow yoa s'posed to come, isn' it? Yeorge says he's coming to fetch yoa in de afternoon. Not so?" While she spoke she moved about busily preparing for him some of the evening meal which she had already cooked.

Without being able to look directly at her, Martin avoided explanations as well as he could. "A fellow with a lorry came to the farm. He was coming beck today, so I got a lift, to save George the trouble of coming out tomorrow."

He sat down to the food which she placed for him, and the three of them began to eat in an embarrassed silence.

Martin was glad when Joe entered soon afterward and joined them at the table. Joe was in one of his happy, communicative moods.

"Yoa hed a good time et Venberg, Martin? I 'member I been over by Simondium 'bout five years ago—fishing by de river. Ha!"—Joe's short, explosive laughter burst out suddenly, as he remembered something else. "Yah, oud Frenk Fister gorn over to Simondium 'bout two weeks ago. He hes a bleddy fight wid his wife. End she kicks him out of de house end locks de door in his face on Friday night. So he says, Hell he's going to hev some peace for a w'ilc, so he y'tst gets a hilt to Simondium, end he's going to work on a farm. Oud Frenk likes Simondium. He got enudder woman over dere. End . . . hey, w'en is de excursion to Elgin? Larst year didn' we go 'bout de middle of May?"

Joe leaned back in his chair, smiling as he recollected the annual trip, which was like a mass migration of the Coloureds into the hinterland. For on that one day in every twelve months he and his cronies held the best poker school of the year, undisturbed under a tree.

"Yoa got a few weeks to wait yet, Yoe Baart." And to cut short Joe's gathering flow, Martha turned to Martin again. "Martin, we got to let Yeorge know det yoa come back, to save him going to Venberg tomorrow. W'en he comes tonight, Linda, we cen see him, eh. He's coming tonight, Martin—in fec', quite soon now—to take Linda to bioscope."

Martin looked across at Linda, and noticed for the first time that she was in her best cloths. And it occurred to him now for the first time how natural it was that George should be attracted by her, and how he himself had failed before now to think about their growing friendship. Even as her brother he now recognised her beauty, and with a mixture of jealousy and warmth he realised the place which she was taking in George's life. These two were coming closer to each other, while between George and himself was growing a wider breach, a breach which Vanberg had opened further instead of closing as George had meant it to do.

When, thinking of this, his mind reverted to Vanberg,

and to the purpose with which he had returned from there, Martin knew that he could not face George. Now, if ever, was the proper time, for from tomorrow his return to Johnnie would answer for him, and the breach would be too wide, but Martin still did not have the courage. Suddenly he rose from the table.

"I think I'll go for a walk. I won't be long."

Before Martha could say anything he had left the room and was outside, walking quickly into the dark, to be away by the time George arrived. Martha and Linda followed his exit with their eyes, Martha with her mouth half-open to speak. Joe, not quite up with the occasion, continued to eat.

George arrived soon afterward, and Martha, intending first not to tell him of Martin's return, could not for long keep to her intention. Feeling in a moment drained of her self-reliance, she wanted George's assurance.

But George, when he heard, was unable to give any, for he rightly interpreted Martin's unwillingness to see him. It gave Martin's answer as clearly as if he had been there to speak it, and George knew that he might now go back to Dr de Wet and admit his failure. Hearing the doubt in Martha's voice—as he had never heard it quite before—he could give her no assurance in return. Tonight was suddenly accumulating the sum of all his failure; he had flitted as ineffectually as a bat in the darkening of Martin's spirit, and now in Martha's sadness he was useless. And the taint of his uselessness lay during all that evening on his feeling for Linda, robbing the evening of that pleasure which he had anticipated through the day.

The next morning Martin went to Baviaan Masters's house, and Johnnie and Skaap were there. Johnnie, being no fool, greeted him with a look in which speculation showed its own triumph.

"So, eh! So Baart is come back! Welcome, Baart! I t'ought maybe we wasn' going to see yoa again. Yoa still t'ink it's a good business to work for de firm, eh?" These last words were sardonic, but when he continued there was some tenderness in his voice. "Yoa sure yoa really want to come back?"

Martin could not keep a slight flush from his face. "Yeh, I'm sure."

There was a pause before Johnnie spoke again. "Well, anyway, we bot' got out of it widout much trouble, eh. Skaap forks up de money for me. Siddown men, Baart. Make yoaself comfortable. We got a bit of time to t'ink t'ings over. Yoa been away out of town a couple of days, eh?"

"Yeh . . . but how did you know?"

"Agh, we yest get to know dese t'ings."

The sun warmed them as they sat. After another silence Johnnie spoke again.

"I'm gled yoa come 'beck, Baart. Now maybe yoa don' reckon we orl wrong; maybe we got somet'ing to be med about sometimes. Dose barstards et de p'lice station is a nice t'rowd, eh! Everybody in de world is helpful, eh! Well, now yoa know pretty well. People like us is yest a bleddy nuisance in de world--so, oright, I reckon we make a good yob of it!"

So Martin returned to the business of collecting old clothes and bottles. At the end of a morning's round a few clothes would appear which had not come into the reckoning. On the very next race-day at Kenilworth they added thirty pounds to their earnings through some light-finger work of Skaap's. One morning, in company with Johnnie, Martin was walking down a small lane—far from the neighbourhood of Wilks Road—with a sack half-full of bottles over his shoulder, and at Johnnie's urging he took a parcel, with fair adeptness, from the front seat of a car parked there, and slipped it beneath the bottles in the sack. He was on edge all the way back to the shed, despite Johnnie's defence of the act.

"Got, don' worry men. A barstard wid a big Buick like det won' miss a liddle t'ing like dis."

The parcel contained a new pair of trousers and a shirt. Johnnie took the shirt and made Martin accept the trousers.

Within a week Martin's conscience had hardened enough for him to accept their activities without the pangs that had tortured him at the beginning. He was still an

initiate, but was learning. He had only to recall the woman at Vanberg to overcome his conscience with contempt, to feel the bitter pleasure which defiance gave. Justice was a thing of one's own making.

It was late afternoon, almost dark, as they went up through the trees of Wynberg Park—Johnnie, Skaap, and Martin. They had walked past the big white church which stood like an admonishment on its island in the middle of the cross-roads; they had come along the road which runs between the military camp on one side and the convent school on the other—up out of the streets and the houses, into the quiet dusk of the park. . . . There the last children were being gathered up from about the lily-ponds and rustic bridges, and over everything the night was bringing silence. They passed two solemn nuns, and as these remote women avoided the eyes of strangers in the dusk, so Martin avoided theirs.

Unhurriedly they walked up the road that led toward the southern slope of Wynberg Hill, intending to allay the suspicion of every passer-by in a world which to Martin was all suspicion. In his imagination everything and everyone they passed eyed them knowingly from behind, being aware of their purpose. These people who passed and fell behind—Martin knew that the night would be full of them, that no matter how dark, those eyes would follow them from behind. As he and the other two passed through the park he hung behind a little, wanting to get out of the tense, troubled world that isolated the three of them at that moment, into the quite different, uncomplicated, undemanding worlds in which the children played, the nuns walked, and the church stood. He wanted the trees to clutch and keep him, to swallow him and let the other two go on.

"Come on, men Baafi!" Johnnie turned and growled his impatience. "For Chrissake don' worry, end stop being sech a bleddy fool. Dis is nicks, men—yest a small yob. It's orl de easier becorse oud Isaac's store is so quiet, wid nobody near et night. Yoa know how quiet it is. Det's

w'y we pick de place. End we not going to take much—yest a little cesh, end maybe a pair of shoes or some-ting. . . .”

As two strangers approached, returning homeward from a day on the mountain, he changed his subject. “. . . Yah, oright, Skaap, I reckon we turn beck yest now. De bioscope is starting et harlf-parst eight, ch? Yest let's walk up to de turn of de road. . . .”

When they were alone again, with Martin drawn up nearer to him, he continued where he had broken off. “. . . Anyway, we not arsking yoa to do anyt'ing so bed. Oul yoa got to do is stend outside end keep a look-out. So yoa got not'ing to worry about.” Johnnie could not, at the end, keep scorn out of his expression.

Martin tried to accept Johnnie's argument. He remembered that the very first time he had been led into partnership with Johnnie he had felt like this, but that it had passed off in the last week or so; and this was much the same kind of thing. But no amount of such reasoning helped; he was unassured by it, and remained afraid in spite of it. And now Johnnie's scorn made it worse; for he had failed as a good man, and now he was failing as a bad one. He had rejected the good, so the bad was his only capacity. Only the bad was savage, and pitiless, and alien, and now he sought not pity, but the wilderness, for only the savage, desert wilderness offered expiation.

But he remained afraid; there was no time to disappear and hide from the consequences of tonight, for the night was already on them. It was only a small job, Johnnie said—a few pounds from the till, one or two pairs of shoes that Isaac kept in the shop, and perhaps a shirt or two. And Martin's was only a small part in it. But he was afraid.

As they came to the top of the hill, where three roads met, the sun had just lifted from the tops of the hills away toward Hanklip, beyond the surface of False Bay. On that side, behind them, the land was still in the last twilight, stretching back toward the great curve of the bay whose water still reflected the light of the sky. To look back was, for Martin, like a beseeching.

The other two walked on unconcerned.

On the other side, before them, it was already dark among the thick woods that stretched down below Kirstenbosch. The sun had been gone long before. And down there were the cottages, and Isaac's store. Martin hung back again as Johnnie and Skaap crossed the road to begin the descent into the valley, skirting the large new houses dotted on the slope.

They had come round the long way, purposely avoiding the direct approach, and were now dropping down into the dark, unfrequented woods. This was Johnnie's first operation of this kind, and he was taking as few chances as possible. It grew darker as they descended and as the massive flank of the mountain rose black above them. The trees crowded in, leaving all the rest of the world to retire into itself and become silent with the night, giving unhindered passage—too unhindered, too easy, it seemed to Martin. The darkness hung back, he felt, to watch. And the trees watched, terrifying, close upon his neck, with crouching trunks, arching arms, damp hands, and branched fingers poised above his spine. And over everything was the mountain, menacing, raised and poised like an upheaving surge of Earth towering before it thundered down. So all the silent world stood about Martin as he followed Johnnie and Skaap, making way for the three of them, following them as the eyes of crowds follow the passage of murderers.

"Come on men, Baart! Get a bleddy move on! It's dark now, so yoa 'i'n' hev to worry. Yoa don' hev to crawl along, cider. End watch w'ere yoa going, eh." Johnnie hissed the words.

As they progressed slowly toward the bottom of the valley he became more impatient with Baart, who kept hanging back and who made his reluctance and his funk so plain. Ever since this job had first been thought of Baart had showed the limitation of his boldness, had argued weakly against harming such a fellow as Isaac—as if the man were his uncle or something like that. And now he hung back, and made his way through the trees like an ox, as if he were blind, or were afraid of the dark and wanted

to fill it with noise. Johnnie thought for a moment of sending him back, and leaving the job to Skaap and himself. But that would not be satisfactory; he wanted two inside the store, to get it over quicker, so someone would have to be outside. And in the same moment Johnnie was viciously determined to force Baart into this, to give him no sympathy, to drive him and test him. Baart had come in with them; he must now do as they did.

While they were still among the trees they came to a halt, not a great distance from the road and Isaac's store. It was still a little early, and Isaac might still be about. But the wait was a torture to Martin, strung between his conscience and fear, afraid to go on and lacking the courage to defy Johnnie and turn back. Each second of darkness was an hour in his febrile imagination. For an awful moment he prayed even that the mountain would crash and bring the whole world down to join the destruction of his solitary soul, and because in that moment the prayer leapt up real and consuming he instantly recoiled from it.

At length they advanced slowly toward the edge of the trees, and by the road they paused to survey the open space over which they must pass. Seeing it clear, Johnnie whispered to Skaap, "Right, Skaap. Yoa got yoa gloves on? O.K."

Skaap srolled as casually as he could a little way down the road before taking his opportunity to duck behind the hedge that surrounded Isaac's plot. As Skaap went the other two watched him, Johnnie keeping an eye on Martin in order to control any impulse to break away. Martin himself dared not glance up toward the cottages, where Martha might be. Then, when Skaap's figure had disappeared into the other side of the road, Johnnie dragged Martin's arm and they emerged into the open. Even there it was now so dark that there was little danger of their being seen. In a few moments they had stepped off the road, and were crouching by the thin hedge.

There was a dim light in the back of Isaac's shop, where he left one light burning in the small room filled with biscuit tins and shelves of canned food and cotton reels and

dusty shoe boxes. The small windows at the front of the shop were half boarded up, shutting off a view from the road. There was a window at the back, which they felt would open without giving trouble, for Isaac was not a cautious, distrusting man.

They were on that side of the shop which was farthest away from Isaac's small cottage, and from the window in which they were interested the cottage was just out of view. But Johnnie was still being cautious, and he sent Skaap out alone to test the window. As he crossed the clear space between the hedge and the store the darkness was such that he vanished before he had reached the store. Martin and Johnnie listened—for to Martin the operation had by now taken on a dreadful fascination, and the noises he listened for were noises in a compelling nightmare. They heard a slight 'hud, then a silence long enough to make Johnnie swear under his breath. Then there was the thin, sharp squeak of the window moving, and a moment later Skaap's figure showed in front of them.

He whispered, "O.K., come on. De window's oright. We yest got to lift it higher."

While Skaap was still whispering Johnnie tugged at Martin's arm, and they followed Skaap back to the side of the store. As they reached it Johnnie pressed Martin down to crouch under the window.

"O.K., Baart. Yoa yest stay her' end keep yoa ears open, eh. Yoa don' hev to do anyt'ing. But for Chrissake don' bugger-off, or somet'ing is going to heppen to yoa."

Having whispered this instruction and threat, Johnnie joined Skaap in pushing the window open slowly, until the opening was judged big enough to let them through. Then Johnnie hoisted himself up and slid through on his belly, his feet disappearing last. Skaap followed in the same manner. As they disappeared, and silence fell again, Martin's impulse was to run. Despite the darkness he felt as if he were alone in the open, naked in the light. The nearness of Isaac in his cottage, and of Martha sitting at home close by, unnerved him all the more. Looking in the direction of the hedge, he knew of the house standing in the small garden next-door—the house where the Sapeikas

had lived, the dark house where Annie Sapeika had died and had lain dead. The place was empty now, unless ghosts inhabited it. Martin turned his face towards the house, to have it so that he could see it, and not behind his back. In the few seconds since Johnnie and Skaap had disappeared the surrounding darkness had filled with noises, and with shapes that watched, and he felt them with the quivering of his skin, and their breath with the hair on his neck.

Suddenly he heard old Isaac speak behind him. The thin, questioning voice pierced the drum-tightness of his terror. Panic screamed through his skull. He wheeled sharply, with the scream frozen on his tongue. In his terror he brought his hand up, clenched and guided by no will of his own, and felt it crack against the bone of Isaac's face. He gripped by instinct the shoulders which he could not see, and shook them, madly and violently. The old man's head thudded against the wall. Martin shook, and shook, and shook, and as the body went limp he continued to shake, and sobbed, "Oh no, Oh no, Oh God, no no!"

And all at once it was over: the old man sinking to the ground like a rag doll, bewilderment hardly extinguished from his suddenly benighted mind, as a light glimmers a moment after its source is cut off; and Martin standing dazed, seeing and despairing, not of his own hideous atrocity, but of the consequences of it, the expiation which, he instantly knew, it made inevitable. As suddenly as it had begun, Martin turned and fled into the darkness.

A few moments later Skaap poked his head through the window.

"O.K., Baart?" There was silence. "Baart! Hey, Baart!" He shielded his eyes and peered down toward the spot where they had left Martin. There was a dark shape, but still no answer. "Christ! Baart!" Skaap pulled his head back inside and whispered, "Christ, I don' know, but he's gorn to sleep, or dropp'd dead."

Johnnie swore, then shrugged, "Oright, let's geddout anyway. We see w'at de silly barstard's doing."

They fell through the window, and as Skaap turned to pull it down again Johnnie bent to shake the figure which

they could now see a little more clearly. He stopped just as he was about to touch it.

"Christ...! Skaap! It's not him! It's... Yesus! Let's geddout quick!"

Without waiting to explain, Johnnie grabbed Skaap by the arm and pulled him away. Together they hurried toward the hedge, and as quickly as they could they made their way back across the road and into the trees, not stopping until they had gone some distance in the direction from which they had come.

When he left the store, Martin fled with no coherent purpose, except to avoid the direction of the woods and of the overhanging, uncompromising mountain, and Martha, who probably sat at home alone. Where he was going he did not know, except that it must be away from himself; and in the back of his mind was the pull of places where lights shone in the streets, where other people paraded their inconsequence, and his own grey tumult would subside into the current and cross-current of Saturday night crowds. Instinctively he hurried down the road and across the bridge in the direction of the town, breathless with the effort of keeping within him the racking anguish that would, if he allowed it, be spilled out in sobs. No one passed him; no one watched him pass down those avenues where the light of occasional lamps made the trees' shadows blacker, or tested the demeanour of this solitary young figure that moved in its own blackness. As he neared the Main Road, and could see the people walking there, he stopped a moment, gathered and straightened himself, and carried on. This was to be his last embrace.

But when he walked among them he felt apart from them, seeing them from an isolated place. He bumped from one shoulder to another, they ignoring him, and he regarding them with a detachment forced upon him. Between them and him was a barrier which momentarily grew, so that the distance made his isolation worse. He stood on a street corner and watched the crowd sway, and break, and gather, and funnel into the doors of a cinema,

laughing, arm-linked, solitary, solemn. They filtered away, leaving the stillness after them. He stared awhile, then turned and walked on. He began to feel such a loneliness that he now looked for the faces of friends. But none came. Everyone passing was a stranger; no eyes lit up on seeing him; no current of feeling came through the dead penumbra of the shadow that was on him. A man approached, whom at a distance Martin thought he knew, but when that man came out suddenly from behind a small knot of people, and Martin was opening his mouth to speak, he saw his mistake. And then the last gates seemed to close on his innermost desert. Like a caught thing he could see them, but they were outside; and within was the barrenness where only misery flourished. He turned from them, shy of their glances.

He walked into a side street, and he had gone only a short way into its gloom when he heard the scuffling of shoes somewhere in front, and a half-shout, and grunts, and all the sounds of a struggle. He stopped in the grip of a fresh terror. Peering ahead into a dark place beneath thick trees, he could just see three men attacking one, beating him to the ground as he flung his arms up for protection. He saw the one go down and sprawl beside the hedge, and the other three bend swiftly and rifle his pockets. And when they had done this dexterously they pushed their victim farther into the hedge, then disappeared quietly up the street. Martin made no attempt to stop them, nor to help their victim, but in terror he turned and fled back toward the Main Road; and when he came back into the light it was all over, like a page turned in a book read in a nightmare.

Farther down this main thoroughfare the shops diminished in size and number; their doorways were dark, and their unlit windows showed, in the dim glow of street lamps, their dusty merchandise in indiscriminate piles. There was a bank, with heavy doors, bleak, secretive, and self-righteous in its eminence among these other places of dingier commerce.

Under the lamp, on the corner where the bank stood, was a Salvation Army Group, pitting its zeal against the

night's indifference. Martin stopped there. People shuffled past in a sparse stream, breaking, going round on either side, and then on without pausing. Now and then one would stop, or even cross the street in a furtive manner, and stand cap-in-hand at the outer edge of the circle of singers who, for the greater part, took no heed of them. Most of these who stopped were old Coloured men, bent and wrinkled, and a little drunk. From time to time one of the militant worshippers, possessing an open, motherly face and rimless spectacles, would look round and smile a welcome, while the others went on singing with a stalwart defiance. One of the onlookers who had stopped would, with dim, befuddled conscience, drop a penny on the ground and sidle away, and a child among the Salvationists would trip round, still singing, stoop, still with her eyes on the book, pick up the offering, and hand it to the leader. The motherly woman would peer round and smile her thanks into the darkness. When the singing ceased, the child stepped forward into the middle of the circle, and without embarrassment she read from the book. No one outside the circle heard her. When she had finished she stepped back; the big drum thumped, the cornet player sounded a note, and they began to sing again. They all knew their parts.

Martin stood watching for a time from the opposite corner of the street, before being moved to approach, fascinated by a ritual like that of purposeful pagans. As he came into the light of the lamp the benign woman welcomed him with a quick smile before turning to attack the tune again. The big-drummer stared fixedly past him, intent on the proper beat. Near Martin stood two untidy, bent-backed reprobates with bared heads, both old, both with expressionless brown faces. They looked as if they would stand like that all night, outlasting the last prayer, but suddenly, like a blasphemy, one hiccupped, turned away slowly, and shuffled up the street. There was a younger man, propped against the doors of the bank. He had a vague smile on his face but his head moved slightly with the beat of the hymn. He had been like that since Martin had come, smoking cigarettes incessantly.

The lamplight cast long shadows, strengthening the illusion of a pagan ritual. The big drum's shadow was a great oblong against which the shadow of the player's arm moved like a piston. Now Martin was not listening, for his eyes drew all his attention to the long shadows. In the light he saw a large black beetle dart suddenly from the gutter and eat through the shadow of one of the heads. Martin shuddered with the horror of it . . . beetles would be running over Isaac's head, unmolested in the darkness under the wall of the store; worms would bore into his skull; his body would be flesh for loathsome, crawling things. Suddenly Martin sobbed aloud. Reaching into his pocket, he took out a coin, and flung it at the feet of the child. Then he fled. The good woman looked up at the sound of the sob and the tinkling coin, and behind her rimless spectacles her eyes began to water as she discerned the young stranger's grief. Triumph and sympathy struggled in her features, and triumph emerged. A sinner had been won; her heart rejoiced. The others sang on.

He had paid his respects, and taken his farewell, had got the blessing of the lady whose eyes watered with compassion, and now he dragged his feet automatically back up through the avenues, struggling to keep his strength against exhaustion. For it was all over now.

. . . Oh that we might not know our misery and miserableness! There is no virtue in knowing it, no virtue in knowing our sin. There is only baseness, unredeemed by the arguments of the devil: "It doesn't matter what you do, my friend, so long as you repent, and know your sin; there is your redemption." Better be an animal, or like the ruined house, and be excused the dignity of men. Or . . . like Martha, like the mother mountain, calm, made to take burdens and suffer storms.

As he crossed the bridge some time later, and approached Isaac's store, he shuddered and passed the place as quickly as he could, without looking that way. It was all in darkness, and there was neither sound nor movement there, and as he hurried past, Martin's flesh shivered with the chill of the place.

He came quietly up to the cottage, but was uncertain of

what to do when he reached it. From the road no light could be seen, but he could not tell if anyone was in the kitchen. Joe would certainly not be at home, and with little less certainty Martin guessed that Linda would be out. But they were not important to him now. His whole uncertainty was centred about Martha. He had so lost touch with her that he did not know if she would be there, sitting in the kitchen while Francis slept, or if both would be in some friend's house. He walked on the narrow grass verge to prevent any sound from reaching her if she were there. Slowly he approached and put his hand on the low wooden gate, but from there he could go no farther. Longing to see her, he knew that he could not speak to her and get comfort from her, for now he was beyond her goodness. He slipped carefully through the gate and tiptoed past the side of the house, and on reaching the back he saw that no light shone from the kitchen.

Leaning heavily against the side of the house, Martin stared long and fixedly at the dark spot where the window was. Now the last prop had gone from under him; and there would be no farewell. After a long interval he pushed himself away from the wall, and in utter weariness he turned to go. In the road he turned up toward Kirstenbosch and the mountain, and without noticing the distance, he came to where the path began to climb steeply. It was no mastering conviction that drove him upward, no decision made at one crucial moment in this dreadful night, but he did not hesitate as he faced the rough pathway. There was an absence of will and of endeavour. As he climbed he cried freely and silently, because Martha had not been there in the kitchen, because now it would come suddenly on his unprepared, inarticulate heart. He stumbled often on the rocks which he could not see; nothing in that light showed clearly, except, as he glanced upward now and then, the outline of the mountain against the sky. He climbed a long way, until, on a place that overhung, he looked round and felt himself poised above the abyss. Immediately below, nothing was distinguishable; between him and the first tiny lights of houses away out beyond the void was only darkness.

Chapter 15

THE next day the Sunday-shuttered shop revealed nothing amiss at Isaac's place, and no one would have gone there and discovered the old man's body. It would have remained huddled under the window until the Monday morning had Francis and his young friends not been playing in the empty garden next door, and looked across and seen it. And, having seen it, they ran away in terror, Francis racing back to tell Martha and Joe. Almost in a moment the people from all the cottages were out in the road, the women standing round in chattering, head-shaking groups, and the men hurrying down to the store to verify and stare, and it was Martha who, hurrying after Joe to tell him to go to a telephone, made the first effort to call the police. During the rest of the day they kept gathering round the cottages, talking in hushed voices, and conjecturing, while the police took over Isaac's house and shop and kept everyone else away. From a distance the people watched the police van arrive and the huddled, blanketed thing being carried to it and taken away.

Later the cottagers had the opportunity of playing a closer part in the business, each according to the liveliness of his imagination, as the police went systematically from house to house, questioning them about the previous night and about the movements of any strangers during the past few days. In the aggregate of recollections the vicinity had during these days, and especially during all hours of the night, been alive with dark and strange figures.

Martha and Joe were both in to receive the police when they arrived at the cottage, but neither could help; they had seen no one but the usual number of people who passed up the road from time to time, and they had both been out the previous night. When the police had left them, Martha remained sitting in the small front room, staring in front of her, and at length, as if she could no longer keep to herself

what was in her mind, she looked across at Joe and spoke in hardly more than a whisper.

"Yoe, I wonder w'ere Martin is, end Yohnnie Peterson."

Joe looked a little puzzled for a moment, before his eyebrows rose and he frowned at Martha. There was a cross note in his voice as he answered. "*Nie*, men, Mart'a. Don' be silly. It's oright." And, afraid to contemplate the fear that she expressed, he went out, leaving her sitting there.

In some way the cottagers learned about Isaac's funeral, and as many as could turned out for it, in whatever black clothes they could find to wear. They found their way to the cemetery, and there formed a solemn, reverent group, where no other mourners were, except the other man who, they whispered, was Isaac's son. He would have come, they guessed, from Johannesburg, where, they believed, he lived. He stood alone, apart, looking a little impatient and manifestly ill-at-ease as he glanced now and then at the only other mourners, the small 'not of Coloureds standing on the other side of the grave. And while the first earth was being thrown back on to the coffin he put on his black hat, appeared to shrug with some relief, and disappeared quickly down the path toward the gate. The others filed away respectfully and made their long way home, and, having put away their mourning clothes, they kept their respectful silence for the rest of the day.

During those two days Martha kept her own anxiety to herself, not even mentioning it to Joe. Since the Saturday morning Martin had not been home, and by the Tuesday, when they buried Isaac, she felt in her bones what she was afraid to bring out into her thoughts. For in her bones she knew the tragic capacity of her son, while in her thoughts she persuaded herself of the limit of his wrongfulness. After that first fear that she had expressed to Joe she did not talk of Martin again, so that even Joe felt the weight of her silence, and withdrew farther into himself.

George came to the cottage on the Monday, having read in the morning paper of Isaac's murder. When he came he learned of Martin's absence. But it was only as the next day went by that his presentiment accumulated against his hope; and that evening he was afraid to return and be

confronted by Martin's continued absence. The next evening—the Wednesday—he could not keep away, but when he arrived at the cottage the confirmation of his fear was in Martha's face before she had spoken a word at the door. When he saw this he had neither the need to ask further nor the spirit to stay. Instead, he excused himself after a few minutes, without having even sat down, having decided in the moment to go immediately and find Johnnie Peterson. It was only as he was going out of the gate that Martha came after him and spoke of Martin.

"Mr Darvel, yoa don' t'ink anyt'ing cen be wrong? Yoa don' t'ink Martin is so bed es orl det." She hesitated a moment. "Mr Isaac was killed by someone."

George sought for something which he could say sincerely. "It *must* be all right, Mrs Baart. Martin is not bed. It *will* be all right."

"I t'ought . . . p'reps if we could find out from Yohnnie Peterson w'ere he is."

"Yes." He answered her eagerly. "Yes, I thought the same. In fact, I was going to see if I could find him, end if I don't I'll go tomorrow again, es soon es I cen."

"T'enk yoa, George." Martha nodded to him, and murmuring her Good-night, she turned back toward the house. George stood there a moment, and she appeared to hesitate and half turn, but then without speaking each turned away again. "

When George arrived at Baviaan Masters's house in Mountain Street there was no one at home. No light shone there, nor did anyone answer his knocking, and as George stood in the dark shadow of the *stoep*, with the window staring at him like a great concealing eye, he shuddered. On an impulse he turned swiftly away and retreated down the street, his skin tingling with the sense that the dark eye followed him and mocked him.

By the next day their answer was half received; some Coloured labourers, working at the highest point of the woods above Kirstenbosch, had found Martin's body the previous day, and late that night, only a few moments after George had left the cottage, the police had come again, this time to break the news to Martha and Joe. .

George read of it in the paper the following afternoon, and in his own room he let the paper slide to the floor as all his strength and his last confidence went out of him. For a long while he sat with his head in his hands, weak and motionless with his failure, as in the anguish of his mind's eye he sought to penetrate the darkness of that Saturday night and find the refutation of what he now concluded must be true. The images of Isaac and of Martin, both dead, would not be disjoined, but in his disbelief George shook his head and whispered, like an echo of Martin, "Oh no, God! No!"

At length he rose, and stood, undetermined in the middle of his room, wiping his hand across his eyes as if to get rid of the image there. He was reluctant to go to the Baarts' cottage and face them, though he knew Martha's tolerance. And though by now he knew the disparity of Linda and her brother, his failure toward the one seemed to him to make a gulf between himself and the other. And this, he realised acutely, was the worst part of it. But against this reluctance there was in the back of his mind the thought that if he went to see Johnnie Peterson there might still be something which, if it did not reassure him, might reassure Martha a little. After a moment he went out to his car and drove off for the second time toward Mountain Street.

Johnnie had been genuinely enough shaken by the discovery of old Isaac, huddled beside the wall of the store, but once he and Skaap had recrossed the road and dived back into the trees he had had the presence of mind to stop and review their situation. To begin with, they had buried and concealed as best they could anything which they had brought from the shop—Johnnie had learned his lesson. Then, with even more care than when they had come, they had gone home by roundabout ways. And already Johnnie had begun to plan his story, the only gap in it being, for the present, the disappearance of Baart. Through the next few days, as his nerves tightened with the suspense of waiting and not knowing the weakness of their story, he cursed Baart, and when on the Thursday afternoon Baart's schoolmaster friend came to Baviaan's house, asking for

him, Johnnie went through to the front *stoep* with an underlying sense of relief. This might be news. But when George Dalvel told him what the news was, he had no need to pretend surprise.

“Dead! On de mountain! *Magtig!*” But even with the shock of it, Johnnie’s half-prepared reaction swung into play. “But . . . but demmit, w’en was dis orl heppening?”

“The paper says they guess he was killed on Saturday, or Sunday morning.”

“But we been—oh, Christ!” Johnnie’s expression and actions were perfect. “So det’s it! *Yah, we been up de mountain off Saturday—Skaap end Baart end me. In de arfternoon Skaap end me reckon we coming down, but Baart—yoa know how Baart is? He gets in a bleddy funny mood sometimes—anyway, Baart says for us to go; he’s going to come down later, end maybe he’s going to see us de rex’ day. So Skaap end me come down, end . . .” Johnnie shrugged expressively, and shook his head. “Christ, men, I’m sorry” And in this Johnnie was earnest.

Listening to this account, and seeing Johnnie’s performance, George wanted to believe it. In any case, he could get nothing else out of Johnnie, and there was nothing to do but to go back to the car and drive away, feeling in himself little more buoyant than when he had come, but hoping that the story might help Martha. He found himself driving in the direction of the cottage, with Linda and Martha and Martin all confused in his head.

Both Martha and Linda were at home, and Francis hung about the house, unable to participate in the inner sorrow of the place, but aware of its presence as a pall on his own young carefreeness. The smile with which Martha greeted George had behind it an unwonted solemnity, but no less warmth than usual. Linda remained in the background, leaving her mother as the protagonist in the tragedy into which her heart was more closely twisted. And likewise, though it was to Martha, as the mother and centre of sorrow, that George addressed himself, it was to Linda that his mind kept going, she being in its background. As George told Johnnie Peterson’s story he tried to turn its

plausibility into truth, glancing now and then at Martha, trying to discover if she believed it or not. But she listened without giving any sign. When he had finished speaking she remained looking out of the door for a minute, then, shrugging her broad shoulders a little, she turned to George and smiled.

"T'enk yoa, George. Yoa been very kind. Maybe everyt'ing is for de best."

Then, as if putting it out of her mind as being part of the Fate over which she could not presume control, she called out to Francis to come and eat his supper, leaving George and Linda outside the walls within which she withdrew. Being thus left, in this close compact with the girl whom he loved achingly but from whom he now felt estranged by his own inadequacy, George could find nothing to say. He had answered his own reason for coming, and to stay would deepen his longing without giving him the capacity to find its end. He felt that it was left only for him to withdraw and cut himself away. And Linda, waiting for him to turn and smile at her again, and show the interest which day by day she wanted more, waiting to respond with her own eagerness, watched him falter and make his awkward farewell, and as he went out of the gate she wanted to cry, her own misery exceeding the house's unhappiness.

Martha did not speak of it again, nor did she question its rightness, nor lament it. Whatever grief she had was a personal one, kept to her heart, not shown before others in her features. In the late dusk of that day she put on her old straw hat, took Francis's hand, and walked, with him for company, out of the cottage and up the road toward the mountain. They both walked together, silently, the child still holding her hand and feeling the contact of her assuring strength, and she feeling his mute, warm confidence in herself. As they turned along the path which followed the avenue below Kirstenbosch, the passing cars were already lighting the long arch of trees that swept upward with the curved road. Her slow mind pondered the will of God, and sought its own faith, and slowly, as they walked up under the immense stillness of the mountain, peace countered the deepening night.

During the following days George kept away from the cottage, denying his own sharp longing for Linda, but never reckoning without her. On the one side, he thrashed out in his own mind Martin's tragedy, and as its elements became distilled in the light of his reflection, his conscience relaxed a little of its grip; and on the other side the vision of Linda kept recurring, building up his yearning against that weakened conscience. Each day the scales came nearer the balance and nearer the point where they must tip and spill out the store of his love. On Martin it was surely the world that had gone sour, the world and all its blind unreasonableness; it was the world that had withered the tender part of the boy that had groped out for beauty, and turned him inward on his own sickness. He had, surely, been incapable of peace, made incapable by his very nature, by the harshness of things beyond the power of George to soften. . . . And she, she was beyond the making of comparisons; she was among those creatures lovely beyond the scope of his deliberating. "While he stayed away from her, every day proclaimed its every minute, to him and to her.

Chapter 16

GEORGE resisted for two weeks, but then could stay away no longer. He suddenly revolted against his own timidity, against the modesty which he suddenly saw was false; and one evening he went to the cottage. As he stopped on the opposite side of the road and walked across to the gate, he was trying to persuade himself there must be a measure of vanity in love, that at some point forwardness was necessary; but he was not being entirely successful. He was a little relieved to see Martha, and not Linda, confronting him at the door.

She was the same old Martha, into whose vast equanimity Martin's death had already been absorbed, and it was the usual welcome that was on her face.

"Agh, harro, Mr Darvel. Yoa not been'to see us for a w'ile."

"Good evening, Mrs Baart. I've come . . . to see if Linda is in. I thought, thet perheps . . . perheps she'd like to come to the bioscope."

Both pleasure and disappointment showed in Martha's face. "Agh, w'at a pity men! She yest went out a little w'ile ago, to go wid Dora to bi'scope. End it was me who told her to go too, becorse she been hanging round de house de larst few dâys looking a bit sed for herself. But anyway, Mr Darvel, come in end sit so long, eh."

George did not conceal his own disappointment, even with the encouragement in Martha's words. "Well, thanks, Mrs Baart, but I don't hink I should stay really. I jest called . . ."

Martha shook her head. "Yah, w'at a pity! Linda will be even sedder now." Then her eyes lit up with a new idea. "Yoa, going on de big picnic to Elgin tomorrow night, Mr Darvel, on de train? Linda's coming."

George knew of the big excursion taken annually by the Coloured people, in the special train that took them for the

day to Elgin. He replied a little ruefully. "No . . . well, I hedn't . . . but, to tell the truth, I was going to ask Linda if she would like to go out in the car somewhere."

On hearing this, Martha's eyes opened even wider with pleasure. "Yah, det's a marvellous idea! W'y don' yoa come out to Elgin in de car, on Sunday morning, togedder? Linda will like it."

George had the detachment to smile to himself at Martha's eagerness, and since the proposal was not unattractive he did not object.

And since, when it had been agreed, there was no cause for him to stay at the cottage, he was able to back toward the door. As he reached it and was about to go out, Martha nodded her head reassuringly.

'Yah, end don' worry about Linda heving any doubt, Yeorge. I know Linda will like it a lot to go wid yoa in de car. I know w'en she come back from de time she went to Venberg wid yoa, she was saying how lovely it is. So w'en Yoc end Francis end me ge on de train tomorrow nlight, Linda will wait for yoa de nex' morning. End w'en yoa get to Elgin yoa cen come end find us. Linda knows w'ere it is we go."

.

The special train, start's from Simonstown just before midnight and comes pushing up the suburban line, the engine at the back, stopping at each station to pick up the waiting groups of Coloureds—the young and the old, the large families, and the couples who know the secluded parts around Elgin, the wives encumbered by their baskets and their broods, and the husbands who have already detached themselves in little conclaves. Out of the dark, down all the side streets which are usually dimly dark at that hour, once each year they come with as much noise and excitement as at a Coon Carnival, to collect on the station platforms from Simonstown to Salt River, and be gathered up as the train makes its slow progress from one end of the line to the other. And at Salt River the train turns back into the Flats, packed to capacity, and pulls slowly across toward Sir Lowry's Pass. In the early hours

of the morning it labours zigzag up the wall of the mountain, and finally, at dawn, it comes down into Elgin and spills its load into the hills.

Each year it was the same in the Baarts' household. Each year Joe would try to doze off in the kitchen, everything having been packed into the baskets in readiness, and he having made his annual protest against all the fuss. Then, with his eyes hardly shut, it seemed to him, he was at length woken by Martha and hustled into shivering activity. He would pick up one of the baskets, still half asleep, try to shrug Martha off as she pushed him through the door, and then go mumbling after her as she hurried down the road toward the station, to come alive only when he met his cronies on the platform. Each year it happened, and each year he would not have missed the day at Elgin even for a day's fishing off Hout Bay. And it was the same this year. As usual, he would have overslept in the kitchen if Martha had not set Francis on to him, and as usual, no sooner had he shaken his head stupidly than a basket was pushed into his hand and he was almost hauled out of the chair.

"Come on, Yoe Baart! Dere's no time to look stupid, so hurry up, men! Francis, come, fetch de udder barsket end let's yoa end me go. Yoa papa is awake enough now, end if he don' want to come—wright! End don' forget det barsket, Yoe!"

Martha gave Joe a push toward the door, then went out before him, leaving him to follow by his own momentum. He was beginning to wake up by now, and just as he passed her, where she waited just outside in order to be able to lock the door after him, he stopped suddenly.

"Oh, got! I forgot de cards, Mart'a. We got to hev de cards - I promised to bring 'em for de boys."

Martha snorted, then shoo' her head sadly. She pushed the door open again and waved him in. "Oright, oright, but don' take orl night, eh! We hevn' got long to go, end it's a long way to walk."

Joe stumbled sheepishly back into the darkness, from whence for the next few seconds came sounds of bumping and low cursing, and the chink of a bottle hitting against

something. Francis stamped eagerly at the gate. Martha stood solidly by the door. There was another chink of a bottle, followed by an audible "Ah!", and a second later Joe emerged, pushing into his pocket something that even in that poor light seemed bulkier than a pack of cards.

"O.K. I gottem! It's bleddy dark in dere, but anyway I gottem."

Martha merely shrugged tolerantly and murmured, almost to herself, "Yah, I suppose wid det in yoa pocket yoa going to hev a nice game, too." She locked the door, and followed the other two out into the road. Holding his mother's hand while they passed Isaac's darkened store, Francis then raced a short way ahead and preceded them over the bridge and up the hill on the other side.

Nearing the station they joined the other groups in the darkness, all going noisily in the same direction, with children scuttling about like water-flies. And then, on the station, it looked as if a carnival had been dumped on to a mass evacuation. All along the platform bundles of straw-hatted mothers sat waiting and gossiping amid piles of baskets and paper bags, their husbands having slid away from their responsibilities into more congenial company, and their children hopping and chasing about in a pandemonium of joy. A bunch of young men—colourful even in that poor light, being dressed in various bits of the jazzy costume of a cool troupe—were shuffling and two-stepping up and down the platform, strumming and humming exuberantly, and were being followed by young girls and urchins, who hummed and sang with them and followed the rhythm with angular motions, like Balinese dancers bitten by a jazz-bug. In the middle of the group a long-necked youth with a face as full and featureless as a balloon ambled blissfully along, moving his ears, his neck, his biceps, and the lower half of his body, in a jointless sort of oscillation.

The one station official still on duty had given up, and had retreated into some dark corner among the milk-cans. As far as he was concerned, the whole mad mob could jump in front of the train.

As soon as the Baarts arrived, Joe mumbled something

inaudible, handed the basket to Martha, and moved off toward his own element, to be greeted with back-slapping and guffaws. And now for Joe the picnic had at last commenced.

"... Yey, Yoe Baart, it's good to see yoa, men! But yoa looking half aslep. Wake up, men!..."

One of them tipped Joe's hat over his eyes, and another gave him a solid clout across the shoulders. Joe grinned, and brushed them aside.

"... I see yoa been painting de place, Yoe. Orl de seats up de udder end of de platform is wet, end soon es we get here, my Sophie sits end gets orl in a mess, so we starting off de picnic fine..."

"... End yoa want to see de levetories, men! Yoa get up wid a bleddy great ring round yoa arse. Men, Yoe, yoa mustn' paint de bleddy seats!..."

They were still chaffing and cackling when the train came into sight. There was a moment's pause along the whole platform, then a bedlam of voices shouting, urging, giving orders, and shrieking for children; and a surge of bodies, baskets, paper bags, guitars, and wide straw hats— a general and sudden shambangle and chaos. Babies teetered perilously over the edge of the platform, teen-agers shouted and waved to teen-agers, small boys jumped on to the steps of the carriages long before they had halted, and from behind, the broad mothers formed a phalanx and pressed solidly forward. Doors were flung open, heads and arms waved deliriously, babies and banjos were handed through open windows, and in a few moments the platform was clear. But just as the train was beginning to move off, someone flung open a door, dashed toward a bench, grabbed the last basket, and ran alongside the train until he was hauled back through the door amid hoots of encouragement and derision. In the carriages infants found themselves being sat upon, and screamed. Stout ladies stood between the seats, fighting stridently for somewhere to sit while small children slipped behind them, sat down, and then gazed intently out of the windows. The girls joined the tangle of banjos, accordions, and sharp brown knees, where the coon troupe had added their

efforts to those of a similarly dressed group already settled in one corner of the carriage, and in the centre of which the balloon-faced youth still contrived to beat time with his ears and biceps while maintaining a serene, empty expression. Everybody crowded in where there was already a crowd.

The carriage at the end of the train remained empty but for two lovers who had the place to themselves, thanking their lucky stars and praying for an undisturbed journey.

At last, when the train was under way, and everyone had settled back and was able to look about him, Joe and all the other husbands found themselves irretrievably separated from their various families. They solemnly shook hands all round, grinned at their misfortune, took out the cards and a bottle or two, and settled down happily to a night's peace. But a degree of quiet had hardly begun to descend when the train came to the next station, and bedlam broke loose again.

And so from station to station the outing gathered strength. And when at last the train turned at Salt River and pulled out toward the Flats with the engine in front, the very front carriage was still empty, and the lovers sighed and sank back into a night-long embrace.

Left alone at the cottage, waiting for the morning and George Dalvel, Linda did not sleep properly all night. In all the other years she had stayed awake with Martha, preparing food and packing the baskets for Elgin, and feeling the excitement of this one great day of the year. She had joined in the gaiety from the moment that they had arrived at the station, and like the others, she had not slept a moment during the night's journey on the crowded train.

This time, as she helped Martha in the back kitchen, she hardly thought about that other side of tomorrow. There was nothing to regret in her missing the crowded train journey and the noisy efflux into the hills at Elgin. All her expectation was concentrated on the morning, when George would come, and in that expectation was such a

keen delight as she had never felt before; for only in the last two weeks had she come to see how George filled her longing, and now when she was away from him, the longing went into the heart of her life. Now it was the spring-time of her love sown in the months of loneliness, and through her humiliation the seed had put out its roots. And it now was the eve of her love's flowering. On her bed she lay awake and listened while Martha and Joe and Francis moved about the house and went out of the door, leaving her shut in her own expectancy. And when they had gone she slept fitfully.

Early in the morning, long before it was light, she rose into the silence of the cottage, which was warm with her own ardency. On the stove in the kitchen a large basin of water had warmed since the others' departure, and she built up the fire to heat it more; and when it was ready she spread paper on the floor, and poured the water into the tin bath. As the mountain caught the sun and reflected it down into the kitchen of the cottage still in shadow, Linda slipped out of her coat and nightdress, and carefully, and conscious of her beauty, she washed herself. In her nakedness she knew the perfection of her body, and in this singing hour she disdained prudence, and waited for the morning to bring George. At length she dressed, in her best and gayest summer clothes, with the same care and eagerness. She put their breakfast things, already prepared, into the basket, and then, with some time still to spare before he was due, she sat, and stood, and walked about, in turn, and grew more nervous as she waited.

It was still early, and still cool down among the trees in the valley, when George came to call for her. As they smiled in greeting, and as he stood at the door and waited for her, and then took the basket from her hand and waited while she turned to lock the door, they were both a little shy and uneasy. They said little of any meaning as they went to the car and as George turned it in the road and drove down toward the bridge. When they had gone only a short distance he turned to her.

"You're not too cold, Linda? It's still a little chilly, and perhaps you might like a coat until it warms up a bit."

She glanced at him, and then quickly away again, before answering. "No, I'm fine, thanks. It's getting quite warm, really."

"You sure you don't want to slip beck end get a coat? It won't take a minute."

"No, really, George."

The two weeks, and the new awareness that had grown in that short time, now restrained them. Each feared to show the awareness by speaking. A few moments later, without a word, and without taking his eyes from the road, George slipped his own coat off and pushed it to Linda, and as she, protesting weakly and then murmuring her thanks, leaned forward and lifted her arms, he held it for her to put over her shoulders. The act—though he had not conceived it in that way—broke through the first awkwardness between them; both were suddenly aware, when it was done, that it had created an intimacy between them, and both flushed.

George drove slowly through the built-up area, hanging back in order to extend the time before they would reach the crowds at Elgin. As the car came out on to the broad National Highway across the Flats, both he and Linda seemed to settle back into the seat, waiting for the day to lead them to the peak of the sun. In front of them the road lifted to the high point of the mountain, which was their horizon.

"It's going to be a lovely day for them at Elgin, Linda."

"It always happens like this—every year. Last year it was fine all day like this, and the very next day it started raining. Winter jest stayed away long enough. Papa said sometimes God knows his stuff."

They both laughed. The awkwardness was thawing, and each felt the response of the other.

"But they must feel very tired by the time they leave the train. I don't suppose any of them sleep a minute—not your father, anyway."

"It's so much fun, no one wants to sleep; and yoa can't get tired when yoa heving such a good time, because when yoa miss orl the pleasure. But Papa goes off end finds a shady place—they all do, all the men—end *they* sleep jest

about all morning. Then they sit all afternoon playing cards, out of the way of the women and the children."

George warmed to her laughter, as she recalled the day as it had always been since she could remember. He was listening not so much to her words as to her voice gaining lightness and eagerness.

"... End every now and then Mama goes along—as if by accident—to see if they drinking too much. She's so afraid Papa will get drunk. Oh, but they hev sech a nice time—all of them; end the children never stop running round end playing games. It's so lovely at Elgin—so many trees. End the apples are cheap to buy. Mama takes a special beg to bring some home each time."

"We'll get some before we come beck this afternoon."

It was the first time that they had been alone in their own right, completely alone, and out of the frame in which each had moved and which, with Martha and Martin and Nicholas Saunty and Wintering at its corners, had confined the power and promise of their love. Now, alone in the glad morning, there was no barrier between or about them, and with the leap and laughter of their hearts each looked into the other's eyes and knew that there was no doubt between them. As the road stretched straight before them, George dropped one hand from the wheel to the seat between them, and it was met by Linda's; and there was no need to speak.

They came out past Foure, down the straight road that sweeps between the avenue of eucalyptus trees. The low, round hills began to lift in front of them and to their left, and now and then over the flat plain on their right they caught sight of the deep blue brilliance of False Bay. A secondary road turned off to the left, toward the hills, and George slowed the car.

"Let's go up here, Linda, shall we? It will be a good place for breakfast, end it won't take us long to get to Elgin from there. It ought to be a fine view from these hills."

He turned to get her answer, and she nodded. So they took to the smooth dirt road that wound away to the top of the high land that rose above Somerset West and Parel

Vallei. As they climbed, the mountains came into closer view beyond, and the bay opened out behind them. Near the highest point of the road, as the inland valley was beginning to fall away in front of them, and where they seemed alone on the whole upland, there was a small copse a little way off the road, and George stopped the car. The air was clear, with a breeze off the bay, but the earth was already warm as they carried the things over to the shade and spread them on the rug.

In these last few minutes they had retreated a little from each other, each being conscious that they had come near the heart of the flame. When they had sat down they went through all the motions of courtesy, passing food and the thermos of tea across to one another, making conversation to fill the minutes between them. . . .

"... I suppose there will be a crowd out at the Strand today."

"Yes, they'll hev a good 'day."

"It's a lovely beach."

"Yes, and it's a nice one out at Strandfontein, too. Yoa go past Zeekoe Vlei."

—He had never touched her, and it was a momentous thing to think of; for he was in earnest, and having touched her he would never be able to go back upon it. It would be unalterable, and though he was sure of himself, he hung back from it. The barrier was as thin as paper—break through it, and she would come to him, with nothing between them. He saw not the wide sweep of the country, nor the bay, but her—she who was near him, who, as she had bent forward to kneel on the rug opposite him, had come close to him, so that he had smelled the clean scent of her hair and had seen the roundness of her throat. She wore a cool summer blouse that hung across the smooth curve of each shoulder and left clear the moulding of her neck, and from beneath her brightly-printed skirt her legs curled, lithe and tawny. She was lovelier than she had ever been before, and was proud. As she spoke he listened with only a part of his mind. . . .

And she talked, quietly and intermittently, to turn his serious gaze from the bay. It was warm now, and she

wanted to stay there, not to move for a long time—if only he would turn and lean across to her.

“... They hev a nice cemping place et the Strënd now. Hev you been there, George... or don't yoa like cemping?”

He turned suddenly and smiled across at her, as if an idea had suddenly occurred to him. “Do *you* like cemping, Linda?”

She answered him a little puzzled. “Yes. Yes, we've been often.”

As she answered, he was looking away again, toward the valley behind Somerset West, and when she had said it he spoke slowly, as if, in those few seconds, he had rehearsed the words and weighed them, and found them wonderful.

“The vines are like ribs over the heart of the hill, Linda—over the warm breast of the hill. . . Eve was Edam's rib, created from him, end for him. They must have been so sure of belonging to one another.”

He turned to lean on one arm, looking at her. “I em es sure, Linda, es sure es them.” He stretched his hand across to her. “End you, Linda?”

She came down to the touch of his hand, and whispered, “Yes, George, I'm sure.”

He rose to meet her as she came down beside him into his embrace that was gentle in its first asking, then strong in its conviction. As the sun moved the shade fell back from them, and they lay in a vast and radiant warmth, betrothed on the breast of the high hill and openly in the light of the sun.

A long while later, as they lay side by side with their faces to the sky, George laughed. “We cen spend our honeymoon cemping—anywhere, from here to the Mountains of the Moon—it doesn't metter, Linda. With you the desert or the end of the world would be the same—the same joy. But honest, we cen do that *Up Ceres way*, or *Glenwilliam*. Would you like it, Linda?”

Linda moved the nape of her neck against his arm. “It would be lovely, anywhere.”

“We cen plen it.” He curled the arm that she imprisoned, and moved his fingers across her forehead and

the fringe of her hair, and she turned her face to nuzzle his wrist. "But we must get merried soon."

"I'm gled, George."

They lay together, without speaking, while the warmth deepened into their bones and flowered in their touching bodies, and the sky burned in an orange light before their closed eyes. The morning was hushed for them, and the world empty for them. At length, but without moving, George spoke again.

"But now we hev to move. We cen drive slowly to Elgin, end see your mother. But in the meanwhile"—he reached up and tore a leaf from the tree above them, and tied its long central stem round her finger—"the knot is for remembering."

He took her shoulders and turned her toward him, and they kissed again, and laughed; and leaping up, he took her hand and lifted her to her feet. Having gathered all the things into the basket, they took the corners of the rug and folded them together, and brought the ends together in their open arms, and as the rug fell between them they let it lie there.

When they came apart again, George picked it up, with the basket, and they returned to the car, hand in hand.

George did not turn the car, but drove it over the brow of the hill and down into the valley toward Somerset West. From there they came back on to the highway and turned toward Sir Lowry's Pass, coming at length over its highest point and down toward Elgin. Under Linda's guidance, they turned away from the main road and up the valley a short way, where, before they had gone far, the signs of the outing began to show. A small child ran from the trees almost beneath the wheels of the car, and having been missed by only the thickness of his trousers, darted away on the other side. When he was followed almost immediately by a hoard of others George drew up at the side of the road.

"For everybody's sake I think this is where we better stop, Linda."

Leaving the car there, they went off to look for Martha. It was not easy to find her—and impossible to find Joe—in

that wide, wooded place. Groups of mothers and babies were dotted like grazing cows in patches of shade, and here and there parties of young people were entwined round the roots of the trees, singing. It was Francis who found George and Linda as he came running in a game of tag. He appeared suddenly in their path from behind a tree, stopped a moment, grinned, shouted, "Harro! Mama's over by dere!" pointed in one direction, and ran off in another. And going, where he had directed, they saw Martha sitting in the midst of a maternal group, all stolid and straight-backed, their coarse-stockinged legs stretched out and crossed in front of them. They all wore various-coloured satin dresses and straw hats.

Martha's face lit up as she turned and saw them. She waved, then laboured to her feet and approached. George hung back a little from the intimidating crowd, while Linda advanced a little nervously. Martha came forward with her face beaming.

"We been wondering w'ere yoa was! Yoa hed a nice ride in de car, Linda? We been here a long time now, end we yest been heving lunch-- becorse yoa papa end de udders come end say dey want somet'ing to eat so dey cen play cards for a good long arternoon. Harro Mr Darvel! It's nice of yoa to bring Linda. But yoa a bit late, eh!"

"Mama . . ." Linda hesitated. She did not know how to begin, but all at once she blurted it out. ". . . Mama, we're going to get meiried!"

Before Martha could answer George interjected, in something of a panic: "So from now on it definitely *hes* to be George, end not Mr Dalvel." As he grinned he felt a little silly.

It was an occasion where there could be no doubt of the expression on Martha's walnut face; and it was not surprise that showed there, but a huge and genial delight at something which she had been expecting but which had, in the end, come with no less pleasure. Grasping Linda's arm with one hand, and slapping the other on Linda's shoulder, she beamed at the two of them, then chuckled happily.

"Oh, I'm *gled*, Linda! So heppy! Yah, so now I *know* w'y yoa been so late, eh!" She turned toward the other

women and opened her mouth to shout to them, but then she shook her head and turned to face these two again. "Nie, de oud mamas cen wait—dey'll soon enough get to know about it. For a little w'ile yoa cen keep it to yoaself, eh?"

"Perheps, Mama, we needn' stay. Perheps yoa wouldn' mind if we . . ."

". . . Yah. Oright. I unnerstend. Yoa don' want to get mixed up wid a lot of people yest nev." Martha chuckled again. "But I mus' tell yoa papa! I'm going orf to find him, so yoa get away and enyoy yoaself so long. Don' worry to stay."

George thought it necessary to say, "But you wouldn't—you end Mr Baart end Francis—you wouldn't like to come beck in the car with us? We could all fit in."

Martha laughed at him. "Got no! I wouldn' never get Yoe to move yest now, end I got to stay to try to stop him getting too drunk. End I wouldn' never find Francis w'en he's running round enyoying himself so much. Nie, it's better if we stay, end den' go home in de train. But it's very nice of yoa . . . Yeorge."

"We cen et least come to the station end fetch you when you get beck."

"Oh no, yoa mustn' . . ." But Martha checked herself. "Well yah, p'reps if you *cen* come it will be a good t'ing. Larst yea' Yoe was so tired end harf asleep det w'en we get orf de train he yest goes to a bench on de station end lies down end goes to sleep—so we hev to leave him end come home. Yoa 'member, Linda?"

Linda's smile was a little self-conscious, but glancing at George she saw that he was laughing openly, so she let her smile broaden. She was becoming more anxious to leave, before they might meet Nellie, or even Dora. And Martha kept them no longer.

"So long, end hev a good day." She turned, and just as she was waddling away to look for Joe, she grinned back at them and said, with a sudden earnestness and gentleness, "I *em* so gled. God bless."

As Linda and George made their way back to the car, Martha went searching for the card-players. It took some

time to find them, for they had moved into the shade of a willow tree down by the river, trying thus to evade the attention which they knew would be turned on them from time to time during the afternoon; they knew Martha's vigilance, and all the other wives'. Every year it happened; as they played cards a vast female shape would come into sight round a tree a short distance away, and would remain facing in their direction like an invigilator. They would look up for a second with slightly befuddled amiableness, would make some coarse comment to themselves, then wave their arms as if they were brushing off a fly. The shape would turn and disappear.

But this time, when Martha caught sight of them huddled together at the bottom of a fairly steep bank, she did not stay her distance, but began to descend on them. One of them, looking up to see her coming, jerked his cards at Joe and announced her.

"Don' look now, Yoe; but dere's an elephant coming down behind yoa."

Four faces turned to focus on her, all having an inner congenial glow.

"She's coming so bleddy fast, if we move p'reps she'll go straight parst into de river."

"It's en idea, men. I never seen sech a sight es en elephant heving a bart' before."

Joe chuckled. "End yoa never 'een Mart'a heving one eider!" But he kept his eyes on his cards. "Try to look busy, men. End yoa orl got to stend by me for support."

As Martha slid to, f' s'op their heads were all bent intensely over the cards. She put her hands on her hips, and tried to look fierce.

"Oright. Yoa needa' orl look so innocent. Listen, Yoe Baart, Linda is yest come, wid Mr Darlvel. Dey got some news. Dey going to get merried."

Joe looked up and grinned. "Mr Darlvel? Oh, yah? Mr Darlvel. Min-m. Yah, de's fine, Mart'a. Finc."

"Well, yoa not going to get excite! Yoa don' t'ink it's nice? Orl yoa got to say is fine?"

Before Joe could answer, the little man on his left looked up at Martha with a look of an affronted and disappointed

man. But Sammie Oswald—lean, wizened, with a small, puckered face—had a twinkle in his eye.

“But Mart’a! Yoa know det orl dis time I got my eyes on Linda.” He put his hand to his breast. “A hendsome *kerel* like me—en yoa let her go away wid some *skaap* w’at isn’ got haif w’at I got. . . .”

There was a roar of laughter from the other two, and one of them pushed Sammie so that he almost rolled into the water. Even Martha could not restrain a smile. But then she turned on Joe again.

“Yoa not going to say yoa gled? Yoa should look so heppy.”

Joe looked up with a broad smile. “Oh yah, I’m very gled, Mart’a. Very gled. He’s lucky to get her, end he’s a nice men.” Ther, he paused, as if he were contemplating, and his smile became more beguiling. “Mart’a, yoa don’ heppen to hev two bob? It’s a little metter of winning beck . . .”

“ . . . Pah!” Martha threw up her hands in disgust, then pushed his head away with the flat of her hand. She turned her back on them and puffed her way to the top of the bank. There she turned and shook her head at them as they beamed up at her, but as she turned again to leave them she was smiling to herself.

Left alone after this intrusion, the four men passed the bottle round and settled down again to play. But a few moments later, in the middle of a deal, Joe looked thoughtfully up at the willow tree.

“Yah, Darvel is a schoolmarter, yoa know.” He looked round at the others. “We cen hev a good drink at Linda’s wedding.”

Chapter 17

DURING the next few weeks Linda had the great joy of remembering that morning on the hill, and the happiness of her new freedom, in which there was no longer any discord. They could all come now—Nellie and Fortuna and Piet—and she would look them in the eyes and have no envy or despair. She would even forgive them; indeed she wanted to, wanted to meet them and smile and be friends and forget the enmity. For in a way she had come back into their presence, into their community which was the community of her people. And she was glad.

She was now working at her new place in Clareview, and it was on her day off that she went to see Martha. At the cottage that evening they were alone, without Joe, before whom Linda would have felt a little embarrassed; so she was able to speak more easily to her mother.

"We want to get merried soon, Mama."

Martha nodded. "Yah, Linda. But no need to hurry too much. I been t'inking. Dere's quite a lot to do w'en yoa getting merried. Mrs Borrow, her daughter is getting merried in Yune-- a big posh wedding et de cet'edral. End Mrs Borrow been busy for a long time, inviting lots of people, and getting some big firm to get ready a marvellous breakfas' et ter house. Of course, we can't afford sech t'ings, but we don' want to hurry it too much-- 'specially wid Y George."

As her mother said this, Linda sighed to herself. She could see the whole extravagant picture building itself up in Martha's mind, and she hastened to restrain these fancies of her mother's.

"But we don' want a big posh wedding, Mama. We hev'n't got a lot of money like the Borrowes. There's no comparison; they live in a big house, jest like . . . like the Sauntys. End Mama, we want to get merried soon."

Martha looked at her daughter for a moment, and in her

blunt, unselfconscious manner she then asked, "Yoa *got* to get merried soon, Linda? I know Katie Fisher down in Ottery got to get merried soon. Her mama end papa tell her end her young men dey carn't get merried yet, becorse her young men isn' got enough wages. So orf dey go end start a baby, so Katie's mama end papa carn't stop dem. End serve dem right, p'reps. Linda, yoa going to hev a baby?"

Linda could not help laughing at the bluntness of it. It made it so much easier to tell the truth.

"It's a little early to know anything, Mama. Perhaps perhaps not." Her expression became more serious, and she looked directly at her mother's face. "I hope so. But it don't make any difference if I em or not. George end me want to g't merried, so there's no point waiting. It would jist make it not so awkward if we get merried quietly—people will forget the time of the wedding easier."

"Oh no, Linda! *Dey* won' forget. If yoa go a hundred miles away end get merried orl alone widout nobody knowing, dey'll find out, end keep looking et de celender end et yoar size. It don' metter—if yoa hev a baby, yoa hev a baby. It's oright; yoa is merried. So it's settled, eh? No use trying to hide it."

And Martha left it at that. She had no desire to offer reproaches now. If it was done, it was done. And George was a good man—she was sure of that. If they loved each other there would be no evil. She switched her mind to the consequences of it all, to the question of the wedding itself. There would have to be a real wedding, one worthy of her own colourful estimate of such an event in their lives. It would have to be in accordance with this estimate, rather than with their means to satisfy it. Martha shook her head and admitted to herself that it would cost a great deal of money—more than she and Joe possessed; but she was not deterred, and in her fancy she began to plan it with a grand and heedless imprudence.

"Yah, we cen hev a big party, nice end posh, end we cen arsk lots of people."

And though to Linda's instinct such an idea seemed exciting and proper, the circumstances made her modest.

"Oh Mama, no. We mustn't hev too big a party. Why can't we jest hev it quiet? End anyway, it's too expensive to hev anything big. George end I don't want anything like thet; we jest want to get merried end then get away."

Martha had the glint of speculation in her eye, seeing it all build itself up into something that all the neighbourhood would remember. Taking Linda by the shoulder, she began to usher her from the kitchen, making as she did so her unanswerable point.

"Linda, Yeor ge is a schoolmarster, end we got to do it proper for him."

"... But ..."

"... We cen get a hall for de reception—p'reps de hall by de church, like w'en Petrouella Walters was merried laist year. Yah, we got to get busy."

Linda had to submit to her mother's inexhaustible zeal; in her massive imperturbable way Martha would carry on, and somehow something would be arranged. And Linda herself was not entirely against it. For her it was a struggle of one emotion against the other, of her happiness in restraint of her pride. First, it pleased her to think of Nellie Sapeika's face and feelings when she stood and watched George and herself arm-in-arm; for George was so far beyond Nellie's reach. The same triumph was against all the girls at the factory—that they should now see her put beyond the effect of their envy; that their tricks should have come to nothing. Then in turn her own pettiness palled on her; in her happiness her ill-feeling collapsed, and she felt the uselessness of gloating.

When Joc came home later, Martha, having thought over her plan, had begun to see its first requirements. If her appearance showed no signs of her new enthusiasm it was because by now forbearance had shaped the impassiveness of her features. There was only a small glint in her eye as she confronted him.

"Yoa come home yest in time tonight, Yoc Baart. Maybe for once in yoar life yoa going to be useful to yoar family. Linda end Yeor ge is going to get merried soon—very soon. Yah, I t'ink probly es soon es we cen get it fixed."

Joe's eyes opened a little wider, his eyebrows rose slowly, and a smile began to show at the corners of his mouth. Seeing it, Martha scowled.

"Oright, yoa mind yoar own business, eh, end don' get no funny ideas."

Joe only answered with a grin and a slight shrug. "I don' mind. I even reckon maybe it's a good t'ing. W'y waste a lot of time?"

"Well, anyway, dey go'ng to get married, end we got to hev a good wedding, wid a reception. But first we got to get some money. I yest been reckoning. P'reps if I ask Mrs Borrow very nice she cen maybe lend me four—five pounds to start. I been doing her washing for a long time now, end she's a nice lady. But det's not good enough. It's a pity . . . it's a pity Mr Isaac isn' here no more. But anyway, I been t'inking, enudder t'ing is for yoa to get some more money. Yoa got to go over to Hout Bay on Saturday end see yoa friend Frikkie . . . Frikkie W'atsit. Say yoa want to go out fishing wid him in his boat, so'long es he cen give yoa some of de money for anyt'ing yoa help him to catch. End yoa unnerstend, Yoe, de money isn' for yoa. Everyt'ing is for de wedding."

For Joe any wedding—even that of his daughter—was much like any other, except that at someone else's wedding there was a chance of a free drink. But for the moment he was prepared to ignore that. Here was some strange good fortune. This time, it was not *he* who, a little timidly, was suggesting that he might go over to Hout Bay for a day or so and help Frikkie Kockstra; and it was not Martha who was standing in his way like a solid gate. She was not harping on bad weather, and storms, and that tub of Frikkie's, and the way they just sold the fish and then went off and drank better than the fish they caught. This time *she* was telling *him* to go over to Hout Bay. Joe leaned back in the chair and listened to her, with a blissful kind of smile on his face.

" . . . Yah, if we give it two or t'ree weeks yoa ought to get enough money to help to make a good wedding . . ."

Joe was delighted.

Not just one week-end, but two or three.

"P'reps, Mart'a, it's better to make it about four weeks, to make sure."

"No fooling about, Yoe Baart. T'ree weeks et'de most."

Joe shrugged. This was not a time to argue. He sat back and enjoyed the vision of the *Annabel* nosing out from the wharf, and himself and the crew sitting back as they turned out from the bay into the Atlantic, and the freedom of being away from week-end chores. He sat with the vague smile on his face, no longer listening to Martha's talk of church halls and the number of guests and wedding cakes and new hats.

Even George, having heard from Linda about Martha's preparations, and having apprehended her own uncertainty and uneasiness as she told him of their elaborateness, was unable to shake Martha from her intention. She shook her head and laughed.

"It's no trouble, Yeorge. End yoa don' hev to worry about de money side of it. I cen get some, end Yoe is going over to fish wid a friend of his w'at hes a boat at Hout Bay. De church hall is not so very expensive—dey very kind about it. We cen menage oright, don' worry."

Martha had no genteel restraint.

She conceded only to the extent of allowing George to arrange, through a friend of his, for the use of a schoolroom near by for the reception. George was able to persuade her that it was for nothing, and he arranged to pay for the hire of the room himself.

When George and Linda had been to see the minister, to arrange for the wedding and had found that it could not be fitted in for another four weeks, no one was as pleased as Joe, and the very next week-end he went off happily to Hout Bay, with the prospect of two or three such week-ends yet to come. When he arrived he was welcomed by Frikkie Koekstra as long-lost, but they did no fishing; some part of the boat's engine was being repaired, and they were not going out that night. But since Frikkie would not hear of Joe's returning to Cape Town that evening, and since Joe was no more inclined to go, they did not waste the time. It was late that night when the two of them rolled into Frikkie's cottage above the harbour, and

blundered around in the dark, looking for a blanket to cover Joe.

The next day Joe helped Frikkie and the crew of the *Annabel* to mend nets down on the wharf, slowly and luxuriously, sitting with their backs against some crates and turning vastly superior glances every now and then toward the trippers who came from the other side of the bay. A painter set up her easel a little way along the wharf, and out of the corners of their eyes they watched her as she sat for a long time, looking down in their direction and painting them against the background of the boats and the bay. But when with pretended indifference they strolled that way and glanced at her from behind, they saw that she had painted the boats and the bay and had ignored them, as if they had not been there. And they laughed at themselves, with their quick, coarse, cackling laughter.

Joe left it until late before starting for home. When he was leaving, Frikkie said to him, "Well, Yoe, I'm sorry about de fishing. Tell yoa w'a, men! Come over Wens-day. We're going out orl day." Joe shook his head dolefully. It was nothing but a wicked temptation.

He had to walk a long way up the road toward Constantia Nek that night before a lorry driver stopped to give him a lift. It was just after midnight when he entered the cottage. Martha stirred sleepily as he came through to the bedroom in the dark. Half-awake she asked:

"Yoa sell a lot, Yoe? How much?"

Joe suddenly remembered what he had gone to Hout Bay for. In the dark his mouth fell open a little.

"U-uh? Oh. Oh yah, Mart'a. No fish. De boat was breaking down, so we got to turn round end come beck end fix it. No fish."

And Joe tumbled into bed and slept righteously.

Martha screwed up her face in disgust, shrugged sleepily to herself, and turned over.

On the following Wednesday Joe took a holiday. He could still hardly believe his luck as Martha actually urged him to get across to Hout Bay on the night before in order to be early enough to go out with the *Annabel* in the morning. He was only too happy to please her.

There was no hitch this time. They tumbled down the stone steps into the *Annabel*, stowed the nets, and chugged away from the wharf, across the bay, and out between the Sentinel and Chapman's Peak. This was the part that Joe enjoyed most: the few idle minutes as they dipped up and down, and hardly seemed to move under the immense land, when he could sit with his back to the engine hatch and watch the towering mountains slide immeasurably slowly past until, without there having been any mark or point of departure, they were gone and the ocean had risen up all around the boat. The noise of the wharf fell away, and that of the people on the beach screeching across the water with delight at its biting coldness. The cars that climbed the long road aslant the side of the mountain, high above the yellow rocks on the sea's edge, became as small as beetles with hard black backs catching the sun. The whole face of the land spread its colours in a glorious canvas: from the surf-edged blue of the bay from the tawny rocks darkening where the sea's reach stopped to the earth bared red to the soft green grass and the fierce green conifers to the blue shadows of the high *Krantzes* and the grey rocks scarred brown and the sky.

Every mortal noise fell hashed against the mighty comparison of silence.

To people gazing from the high road the boat grew smaller than a sun-glint on the water, and then merged into the featureless ocean.

The sea made no demands, being tolerant. In some instinctive way Joe sensed this. It was too vast to care; and at its worst, in its violence, its demands were simple, being clear-cut and beyond compromise. There was no complexity on the sea, but a freedom and an absence of all responsibility; a great magnanimity and simplicity. To Joe, who was not a thoughtful man, all this was a feeling, like joy.

When Frikkie called him he rose gladly and gave a hand, entering the cursing, laughing, toiling mood of the four others in the crew. And when they came home that night it had been worth four pounds in money to Joe. He put

three of them in his back pocket, buttoned it, and nodded to Frikkie.

"Keep me from temptation, eh."

Nor did he get back to the cottage until very late. When eventually he crept into the bedroom, and saw Martha's head begin to turn on the pillow, he grinned.

"Oright, oright. T'ree pounds for de kitty."

Joe pulled the notes from his pocket, placed them respectfully on the pillow by Martha's head, and as she grabbed them and put them under her own pillow he solemnly undressed.

But, with the excitement of the first preparations subsiding, and that of the actual wedding still some time off, Martha began to feel a little flat. The stir of memory would put Martin before her again, and with that memory would come some feeling of the insignificance of everything—of loving, marrying, dying, living. She would look up at the mountain and see it unmoved; and she would sit back and know that everything must take its course, that nothing which she or Joe did or failed to do would stop it.

On the following Saturday Joe slipped out of his overalls promptly on finishing work, and without going back to the cottage, he took the road to Constantia Nek, anxious to catch a lift which he had arranged with a lorry-driving friend of his. He rode on the back of the lorry, lying lazily on a pile of sacks. He stared up at the sky powdered with a light film of grey cloud, having no cares. Now and then, as they followed the curve of the road under a steep slope, trees came down and shut off the sky, and then went soaring up in a sheer black-green wall that seemed to confront the day with a sudden night. As the lorry heaved over the highest point of the nek and dipped suddenly on to the downward slope Joe felt the quick float and sink of his stomach, and he laughed with the pleasure of it. There was an utter carefreeness in him, a simple, thoughtless contentment.

When they came down on to the lower stretch of the road and the oaks leant over to meet and mingle in a low canopy, he laughed again, louder, from deep in his belly, and put up his arm lazily to touch them, knowing that they

were away out of reach but feeling it was worth the gesture. Then the oaks were left behind, and poplars threw straight shadows on the road. As they came down toward the crossroads, where the houses and cafés began and the trees petered out, the sun warmed Joe; it came white and warming off the great slope of sand on the other side of the valley. The lorry swung down the road across the valley, and for a moment the back of Table Mountain came into view. The grey film of cloud was thicker there.

There were more cloud shadows on Chapman's Peak, and the Sentinel was grey, as early in the afternoon the *Annabel* moved out from the wharf of the fishing harbour. Joe sat by the engine hatch and watched the mouth of the bay open out to them and then close slowly behind as they dipped their way out to sea. The farther they went the more did the Peninsula spread out in their wake—from the Twelve Apostles behind Table Mountain, down past Kommetje lighthouse and Witsands toward the Cape and the open ocean that felt dark and endless at the bottom of the earth. When they had gone some way out from the coast they turned down in that direction, slower now, with the old engines turning just sufficiently to prevent the *Annabel* from drifting toward the coast. Slowly they made their way down toward the Cape, where late in the afternoon they would fish in the waters where the oceans meet.

Frikkie was hopeful. They had had two good nights during the week.

"If we lucky, Yoe' we cen get beck wid a big cetch, and den de wedding is easy—yoe cen hev chempagne. Yoe arsking us along, eh. We deserve en invite."

"Yah, but of course I got no say. It's Mart'a."

"Ya-ah, go on! Don' be so bleddy proud, men. Too good for us orl on Ennebel, eh? Stinking of fish, eh?"

Joe only grinned, refusing to be drawn by Frikkie's good-natured provocation.

As they all turned to manhandle the nets Frikkie rolled his eyes appreciatively.

"I seen her—Linda—one day et Hout Bay, wid her swimming costume. Pity we getting too old, eh. Ya-ah, pity."

The wind was freshening, and as they prepared the nets Frikkie looked up at the sky a little anxiously. The clouds were coming up from the sea to the west, and were building up into what looked like another land mass over the Peninsula. The *Annabel* was down toward the Cape now; the land stopped short, the cliffs came down sharply to the small lighthouse already sending out its light. Away beyond that, in the distance, Cape Hanklip showed faintly on the other side of Fals Bay, but that faded as the daylight went.

"Christ, I s'pose we going to hev a bleddy storm, eh. End yest w'en we want to make a good catch. De bleddy sea make sure yoa don' get too much from her--like a bleddy woman. Couple of good nights, and det's finished. Den she gets tough."

Frikkie did not yet seem greatly concerned about the storm itself. The *Annabel* was solid enough. His concern was still for the fishing. As they lowered the nets in order to try and bring something in before the sea became too rough their hopes were not good. One of the others frowned across at Joe and grumbled.

"Not much coming from dis trip for de wedding, Yoe. I don' see no point in putting out de nets, Frikkie. It's getting too rough, men. We want to get beck."

"Yest now, men. Yest now. Let's try so long. Got to help Yoe."

But the wind continued to rise. When the sun went down, showing for a moment in a long narrow blaze on the horizon between the black line of the ocean and the black shelf of clouds, all the light suddenly went out of the world. And both the wind and the waves seemed suddenly to rejoice at its going. They rose and tossed the spray about. The land disappeared into the darkness.

This turn was serious enough to change Frikkie's mind. He shouted for the nets to be dragged in. They all stumbled hurriedly along the deck, heaving and lurching, being tossed down against the gunwale and then back against the hatches. They muttered and swore, and fear began to dominate them.

At length the nets, hardly out, were in again, and Frikkie was shouting his orders:

"Push dem in men, quick! Get de hetches down! We mustn' losc dem! Quick!"

The sea roughened. Black water came over the bows. The *Annabel* shuddered, paused, and seemed to leap on again, toward home now. But the light on the Cape seemed to stand still; each time it came up into view it seemed to be in the same place on their starboard side, small and uncomfoting sign of man against the elemental violence that darkened about them. The three members of the crew were afraid, and even Frikkie muttered nervously to himself. Someone's thin voice came through the rush of water and wind:

"Christ, w'y we leave de bay today I don' know. Frikkie, yoa made a bleddy orful mistake."

Frikkie turned savagely on the voice, and shouted against the wind:

'Agh, shuddup men! It's oright."

He kept glancing anxiously toward the land. That was where their peril was—on the rocks of the open coast. He moved slowly back to the man at the helm.

"Yoa keep her out, to sea, ch."

The *Annabel's* engines strained to push her forward and to keep her nose out of danger.

In all this Joe was calm—more so than the others. While they grew alarmed, then frightened, he remained stoical, as if he had not the wit to understand their danger. And, in a sense, that was the reason. The others' fear arose out of a violent tenaciousness of life. Instinctively they knew their right to life, and feared for it, and clung to it. They planned their going and their coming with an eye on the water and the wind. They were put out by the disarrangement of their little purposes, in which they put great stock. And now they faced the frustration of them all. They faced a darkness beyond their purposing and their understanding.

But for Joe life was an easier passage. His purpose was more the purpose of each moment, which he was content to follow. His nature was malleable to the change of

events; he was not quick to see—and so to resent—the consequences of them. He expected little. In danger like this he was something like a child, prepared to accept what came because he had fixed no alternative.

The *Annabel* strained and shuddered under the blows of the sea. Heavy white water washed the decks, and the air was full of thunder and spray. The moon coming between clouds for a moment gave a faint light that only illumined the water's whiteness against the black ocean, and then it was all black again. In the heaving, foam-washed tumult of blackness they each sank down into themselves, crouching in the light of their own praying hearts, and were all silent. They lost touch with time.

Suddenly the engines turned as if the force against which they pushed had been snapped off.

"Jesus! Jesus! De propeller!"

Frikkie almost sobbed the words, and no one heard them.

The *Annabel* rose high as if to wave to the distant light, then dropped down under the dark weight of the next wave. And then just as suddenly Frikkie, making his way along the side of the engine hatch, was seized by the full weight of a wave and lifted. His cry came over the tumult. For a moment Joe saw him, arm stretched against the water, before he disappeared. When the boat rose again through the wave he saw Frikkie still there, bunched against the gunwale like a lump of net. In the clear moment before the next sea a man could have staggered across and caught Frikkie and held him.

But Joe remained crouched. During that moment he felt no quick compulsion. It was not that, knowing what he must do, he failed to do it, but that he did not know what to do. Into his blurred senses, in which the storm was a vast numbed noise, came no clear, instinctive knowledge of his duty, no quick reflex to action. He saw Frikkie and was quite unmoved.

The sea rushed over them again, and when it passed Frikkie had gone. And in his numb mind Joe accepted it, as if he had been watching a staged drama.

The whole ocean burst from its depths. Over the

screaming wind and pounding water came the booming of great waves on mighty black rocks. Joe was alone in it. Everything fell into a booming, flooding onrush to doom. And Joe was alone. The others had fallen out of his mind. He felt nothing but a confused acquiescence.

The sea rose again and enveloped him, to save him from the awakening wherein he might come to see his failure and be mortified.

By Monday the searching boats had found no signs of the *Annabel*. On Tuesday the body of one of the crew was found on the shore south of Witsands, and near by a piece of wreckage was found. That evening the police came to the cottage to tell Martha that there could be no hope. They walked with a sure, brusque manner from the road. They took a statement, impersonally and professionally, asking Joe's height, and the clothes he was wearing, and whether or not he had false teeth. Martha sat on the edge of her chair, gazing in front of her with what seemed to them a preoccupied air. She was wondering why they needed to know all this. If Joe was dead, then he was dead, and it would make no difference in what suit he faced God. While she answered their questions as well as she could she hoped they would never find him. Her mind went back in a curiously dispassionate way to when they had seen a long-drowned corpse pulled out of the sea down near Scaforth, and she did not wish Joe to be like that. They went on questioning her, and she nodded and answered when she could, gazing all the while at the floor.

When Joe was sufficiently identified for the statistics, the brusque policemen rose, shut their little note-books, and turned toward the door. Just as they were going through it one of them—the larger and stonier one of the two—turned, with an uncommonly kind look on his square face, and said awkwardly:

"I'm sorry, Mrs Baart."

Martha looked up suddenly and half smiled as he went out of the door. His words, surprising and awkwardly uttered, brought to her a feeling of emptiness, a feeling that

within her vast frame there was nothing. She continued to sit on the edge of the chair, and slowly, like a grey light dawning, her loss unfolded itself. There was now an emptiness outside her, where Joe had been. He had given her nothing but a little money each Friday night; all else had ceased many years ago. But where there had been a light, which she had not seen as a light, there was now, somewhere within her, a patch of darkness. First Martin, now Joe: no temporary absence, but a loneliness come before she knew of it and before she could mourn for it. And discovering it late, its sharpness was gone.

Francis came in. Throughout the day he had not understood it, and had been a little bewildered. Then people had pitied him and let him see the tears of their pity; and now he came sobbing. Martha took him in her arms and laid his head on her shoulder. Then, smiling a little absently, she pushed him out to arm's length in front of her and smoothed the crisp black hair.

"Dere, dere, Francis. On'y small boys cry. End you're a men, eh? Come on, we got to get supper ready."

She led him through to the kitchen.

George and Linda came later that evening, when Francis had gone to bed dry-eyed. As Linda came into the kitchen where Martha was she kissed her mother, and George coming behind did the same, for the first time. Then they said that the wedding must now be postponed.

Martha looked at them and smiled slowly.

"No. No, dere's no good. It don' make it worse because Yoe is gorn. End it don' make it better to stop de wedding. It don' make no difference." Then she paused, and her smile widened a little. "But den, I don' know so much; w'en yoa hev poison in yoa, yoa take a med'ine w'at isn' poison. We cen put a wedding agoinst a sedness."

And they could not persuade her otherwise during the next few days.

For the wedding all the neighbors were at the church—spruce in their black stockings and straw hats, their new satin dresses and stiff white collars. The reception in the schoolroom was a success, and all the women kissed both Linda and Martha with a special tenderness. Late in the

afternoon Linda and George left in the car. Martha and Francis stood by the road together, a little apart from the crowd, and waved them good-bye, and as they glanced to wave back at the two figures standing together, Linda and George felt guilty in their happiness.

The next morning Martha and Francis took the train to Simonstown. They left the station and turned up the road toward Redhill, Francis galloping about like a colt and Martha plodding sedately along the verge. The grey ships fell away below them, and the wide bay opened out. And at the top the wind, blowing from the clear sky, met them warmly, and the other ocean spread out before them. They went down toward Camel Rock, and as they went the whole beguiling ocean spread farther and farther in a great sheet of light.

THE END